Rewinding Internationalism. An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary

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Content

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Artistic Practice at HDK-Valand – Academy of Art and Design, The Artistic Faculty, University of Gothenburg.

Published by the University of Gothenburg (Dissertations).

This doctoral dissertation is No 99 in the series ArtMonitor Doctoral Dissertations and Licentiate theses at The Artistic Faculty, University of Gothenburg. www.konst.gu.se/artmonitor

Gothenburg University Publications Electronic Archive (GUPEA): ww.hdl.handle.net/2077/78835

Book design
Sarah Tilley, with Siel Van Heukelom
English copy editing
Janine Armin
Printing
Stema Specialtryck, Borås, Sweden, 2023

ISBN 978-91-8069-437-7 (print)
ISBN 978-91-8069-438-4 (digital)

This doctoral project was a collaboration with Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven.

UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG

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Note on the text

This publication contains a series of essays, conversations and introductions to publications written or published between 2019 – 2023. Alongside the Research Overview, the two publications on *Rewinding Internationalism* (at Netwerk Aalst and Van Abbemuseum respectively) and the digital appendix, they form part of the doctoral project '*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary'. The contributions in this publication, and their role within the doctoral project, are described at length in the introduction to the Research Overview, the counterpart to this book.

All bar one of the texts included here have been published elsewhere – in publications related to my own exhibitions (*The Place is Here* and *Yael Davids: A Daily Practice*), as part of editorial projects for a journal (PARSE) out or at the invitation of publishing platforms (Vector and L'Internationale Online). The opening text 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations' is the only unpublished text, written early on in the research process as a set of elobarated notes and specifically within the frame of the doctoral project.

The different contexts within which these contributions have been conceived and written is reflected in the design by Sarah Tilley, which maintains the layout and typography from the original publications.

Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial. Some Preliminary Observations

Author Nick Aikens

From Unpublished essay

Year 2019

The following preliminary observations on theories of articulation and the curatorial outline their similarities as trans-disciplinary epistemological processes and discourses with different genealogies and relationships to a political and ideological project.[1] Bringing these discourses together as a method, has become central to my curatorial research project and practice. Instead of testing selected theories of articulation and the curatorial, I *practice* mapping, surveying the origins of these theories, i.e. articulation in the 1970s writing of Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau and adopted by cultural studies in primarily 1980s and 90s Britain, and the curatorial during the onset of post-graduate curatorial degrees in the latter 90s and desire to define emerging practices within an increasingly globalised art system. I then contrast how the respective discourses situate themselves theoretically: the former reappraising Marxist thought and looking towards the work of Antonio Gramsci and Louis Althusser; the latter having a much looser relationship to theory whilst being indepted to post-structuraslist thinking. Lastly, I suggest that these two dis-

[1] This text was written in the first year of the doctoral project. For the PhD submission I opted to leave it in its original form despite its limitations, particularly as it describes the curatorial predominantly in relation to practionners associated with the Curatorial Knowledge programme. Elsewhere in the submission, and in the research outline, I consider an expanded frame of reference for the curatorial, and specifically how it relates to research-exhibition practices. However, this text demonstrates the initial framing that informed the original specification of the research task and the theme of the political.

courses see themselves as playing an epistemological, political and strategic role with respect to histories-in-the-making.

Articulation

What follows draws partly on texts I have written in relation to articulation, with some new observations and reflections.[2] For the purposes of these notes I want to draw on three core texts by Ernesto Laclau, Stuart Hall and Jennifer Daryl Slack.

After 1968, within the field of cultural studies and in the context of a crisis in Marxist thought, theories of articulation developed as a practice and analytical tool to link theory with action, rooted in a leftist history of political struggle outside the university (e.g. Gramsci). Yet unlike the curatorial, articulation has an unambiguous theoretical and political genealogy with some origins in Laclau's *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (1977) that asks after the 'connotative or evocative links' between certain discourses and customs, and how concepts are linked to concrete situations or realities.[3] Laclau posits that political discourse is not inherently grounded in class struggle; it is rather

[2] See, for example, 'A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1980s', in Nick Aikens and Elizabeth Robles, ed., *The Place Is Here: The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019, pp. 22 – 33.

[3] Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism – Fascism – Populism*, London: NLP, 1977, p. 7.

about how different actors link a particular discourse to a specific struggle that allows political discourse to gain traction and lend it hegemonic potential. At the core of the Argentinian theorist's argument is a push away from the reduction of theoretical concepts, particularly those pertaining to classic Marxism, to the extent that they become divorced from other theoretical concepts and the specificity of social relations. He calls instead for an articulation of different theoretical concepts with the concrete.

In his essay 'Towards a Theory of Populism', Laclau gives his clearest account of theories of articulation set in relation to an analysis of nationalism, which he rightly identifies as not having an inherently distinct ideological position. Nationalism can be understood within the context of self-determination and processes of decolonisation. At the same time it has also been mobilised within nationalist-socialist and/or fascist movements. It is then the way that nationalism is picked up and articulated in contexts and at conjunctures by political actors that gives it a political dimension. It is worth quoting Laclau at length:

> The principle of articulation [is revealed in] its constituent interpellations. The class character of an ideological discourse is revealed in what we could call its specific articulating principle. Let us take an example: nationalism. Is it a feudal, bourgeois or proletarian ide-

> ology? Considered in itself it has no class connotation. The latter only derives from its specific articulation with other ideological elements. A feudal class, for example, can link nationalism to the maintenance of a hierarchical-authoritarian system of a traditional type – we need only think of Bismarck's Germany. A bourgeois class may link nationalism to the development of a centralised nationstate in fighting against feudal particularism, and at the same time appeal to national unity as a means of neutralising class conflicts – think of the case of France. Finally, a communist movement can denounce the betrayal by capitalist classes of a nationalist cause and articulate nationalism and socialism in a single ideological discourse – think of Mao, for example. One could say that we understand by nationalism something distinct in the three cases. This is true, but our aim is precisely to determine where this difference lies. Is it the case that nationalism refers to such diverse contents that it is not possible to find a common element of meaning in them all? Or rather is it that certain common nuclei of meaning are connotatively linked to diverse ideological-articulatory domains? If the first solution were accepted, we would have to conclude that ideological struggle as such is impossible, since classes can only compete at the

> ideological level if there exists a common framework of meaning shared by all forces in struggle. It is precisely this background of shared meanings that enables antagonistic discourses to establish their difference. The political discourses of various classes, for example, will consist of antagonistic efforts of articulation in which each class presents itself as the authentic representative of 'the people', of 'the national interest', and so on. If, therefore, the second solution – which we consider to be the correct answer – is accepted, it is necessary to conclude that classes exist at the ideological and political level in a process of articulation and not of reduction.[4]

At the end of this passage Laclau specifically identifies the principle of articulation as an alternative to Marxist reductionism in understanding class. This paves the way for thinking through social formations, here class – but later questions of race, gender and sexuality – as being contingent; how they are understood and operate is dependent on the contextual configurations in which they appear.

The cultural theorist Stuart Hall arrived at his theory of articulation through analyses of race at the end of the 1970s. Like Laclau,

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

Hall defines articulation as a move away from Marxist reductionism. In his 1980 essay 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', Hall offers one of the most detailed accounts of his own theoretical position in relation to articulation. He does so through an analysis of two positions in relation to then contemporary understandings of race: the 'economic' and the 'cultural'. Hall suggests that these two understandings respond to each other:

> the former tends to be monocausal in form, the latter tends to be pluralist in emphasis. If the dominant tendency of the first is to attempt to command all differences and specificities within the framework of a simplifying economic logic, then that of the second is to stop short with a set of plural explanations that lack adequate theorisation and which in the end are descriptive rather than analytic.[5]

The problem here is not in deciding which reading must take precedence over the other, but their lack of theoretical connection. Hall uses two concrete examples to demonstrate how these two approaches to the analysis of race might be compatible: the first is that of racial division in apartheid South Africa, which cannot be read simply in terms of cultural difference,

[5] Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in Houston A. Baker, Jr, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg, ed., *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996, p. 18.

and must take into account structural political and economic relations; the second is slavery, complicating the classic Marxist understanding of capitalist production, and leading to a theory of articulation. Hall writes: 'whereas under capitalism the worker owns his own labour power which he sells as a commodity to the capitalist, slaveholders owned both the labour and the slave'. The two modes of production 'the one "capitalist" in the true sense, the other only "formally"… are combined through an articulating principle'. Hall continues:

> In short, the emergent theory of the 'articulation of different modes of production' begins to deliver certain pertinent theoretical effects for an analysis of racism at the social, political, and ideological levels. It begins to deliver such effects – and this is the crucial point – not by deserting the level of analysis of economic relations (i.e. mode of production) but by posing it in its correct, necessarily complex, form.[6]

Articulation, here, is not a random bringing together of disparate concepts, but is dependent on a structured relation. This is summed up in Louis Althusser's phrase that appears repeatedly in texts on articulation theory and is used in the title of Hall's

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

essay: 'a complex unity structured in dominance.' What Hall offers is both an analysis of race and a theory of articulation that inform one another, similar to the relationship between articulation and nationalism put forward in Laclau's *Towards a Theory of Populism*.

Jennifer Daryl Slack's 1996 essay 'The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies' is a different type of text from Laclau's and Hall's.[7] Looking back on articulation as a central method for cultural studies,[6] Slack tries to summarise its main tenets rather than to use it to work through something (i.e. nationalism or analyses of race). Slack's essay is most useful in identifying what she sees as the frameworks within which articulation function, namely, epistemology, strategy and politics. She writes:

> Epistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structure of what we know as a play of correspondences. [...] [P]olitically articulation is a way foregrounding the structures and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination [Althusser's structured in dominance], strategically articulation provides a mechanism for shaping inter-

[7] See Jennifer Daryl Slack, 'The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies', in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen, ed., *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, London: Routledge, 1996, pp.112 – 27.

ventions within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context.[8]

What emerges in the writing on articulation and by inference cultural studies – and what is helpful when we start to look at some of the similarities between articulation and the curatorial – is the way both see themselves as transdisciplinary, epistemological practices. As Jon Stratton and Ien Ang write when assessing the 'impossibility of a global cultural studies': 'What sustains the intellectual liveliness and dynamism of cultural studies is a desire to transgress established disciplinary boundaries and to create new forms of knowledge and understanding not bound by such boundaries'.[9]

Theories of articulation come out of a theoretical and political trajectory rooted in what we could broadly term Western Marxism and the critique of ideology. Slack outlines the importance of three figures for its development: Althusser, Gramsci and Marx. From Althusser articulation takes the phrase 'the conception of a complex totality structured in dominance' – the idea that there are many different levels in society that are articulated

[8] See ibid.

[9] Jon Stratton and Ien Ang, 'On the Impossibility of a global cultural studies "British" cultural studies in an "international" frame', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, p. 112.

together.[10] From Gramsci, and related to this, articulation theory takes the notion of hegemony, which we could define as the strategic practice that allows dominance to be operative. From Marx 'is drawn the conception of a social formation as a combination of relations or levels of abstraction without which determination must be understood as produced uniformly and directly by the mode of production'.[11] The theoretical genealogy of articulation is, therefore, firmly within the Marxist tradition, even if it tries to move away from the perceived restrictions of class reductionism.

There is a healthy scepticism towards theory and ideology, certainly posited by Marx, that permeates articulation and cultural studies at large. In the 1970s Hall was arguing for the use of theory only when trying to 'engage the concrete' Laclau similarly introduces articulation as a way to break. The use of concepts as free-floating signifiers that are not attached to material facts or contexts 'in the real'.[12] Theory is a tool with which to work, rather than a sphere within which to operate. Understanding the relationship to theory also leads to an understanding of the

[10] See Louis Althusser, For Marx, trans. Ben Brewster, London: Allen Lane, Penguin Press, 1969[1965].

[11] Slack, 'The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies', p. 117.

[12] See Stuart Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees', Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies, pp.25 – 46 and Laclau, 'Towards a Theory of Populism', *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, pp.143 – 98.

ideological position of articulation. Its use of Gramsci's notion of hegemony in particular is premised on the basis of trying to understand and intervene in/unsettle dominant systems of power.

Articulation developed with Ernesto Laclau, even though as Slack points out he is rarely credited within the discourse on articulation and cultural studies. By the time Hall took up the term in 1979, he had left the Centre for Cultural Studies (CCS) in Birmingham for the Open University in Milton Keynes. Articulation must be read as part of a context (or correspondences) related to cultural studies in the late 70s, 80s and 90s with Slack emphasising how 'critical' it was 'for understanding how cultural theorists conceptualize the world, analyse it and participate in shaping it'.[13] The 1980s saw a huge growth of cultural studies courses and paid positions in the UK. Interestingly, when cultural studies enters American universities there is far less emphasis on theories of articulation, something art historian Kobena Mercer mentions in a 2017 essay on Hall.[14] In this sense it is important to highlight the very British context out of which articulation flourished, even if some of the foundational work was done looking towards

[13] Slack, 'Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies', p. 112.

[14] See Kobena Mercer's introduction to Kobena Mercer, ed., *Stuart Hall: The Fateful Triangle – Race, Ethnicity, Nation*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017, pp.1 – 31.

Latin America (Laclau) and South Africa and the Caribbean (Hall). Likewise, some of the key concepts (hegemony from Gramsci, 'structured in dominance' from Althusser) are part of a Western, European Marxist discourse. Later in the 1990s articulation and cultural studies was taken up outside the main Anglo-Western centres – particularly Latin America and Thailand – but its genealogy remains very much wedded to Britain and, the CCS in Birmingham (Hall, Richard Hoggart and Raymond Williams).[15]

The curatorial, which I shall now turn to, does not arise out of a clear ideological and theoretical position in the way cultural studies was then engaging class and identity politics, or the question of representation. It is not possible to identify a specific 'politics of the curatorial'. Rather, as I shall look at, its politics are grounded more obliquely in how it operates as an epistemological process.

The Curatorial

As a field of study, the curatorial is located between humanities departments in universities and the art system of institutions, biennials and the art market. There is not a singular curatorial discourse. While curators working in Europe and America had,

[15] The 'internationalising' of cultural studies was the focus of the 1992 conference 'Trajectories: Towards and International Cultural Studies', which took place in Taiwan and was organized by Kuan-Hsing Chen.

since the 1970s and 80s, leaned on the humanities and critical theory to bolster their claims for an exhibition or a particular set of artists, the 1990s and early 2000s saw the emergence of curating as a specific field of practice. Earlier attempts at definition have been largely from UK, European or US universities or publishing projects, even if these projects have drawn from diverse perspectives and often foreground postcolonial and decolonial theory as a means to decentre US-European (art) histories.

A number of connected factors contributed to the emergence of curatorial discourse in the 1990s: the increase of MA curating and curatorial studies courses, largely in the UK and US which by the 2000s rapidly expanded internationally, necessitating that the field define itself beyond practical or technical skills connected to exhibition making. The introduction of postgraduate courses was in turn a response to the increased prominence of the role of the curator as the biennial model proliferated in the 1990s.[16] This model, as has been commented on extensively, seeks to negotiate a line between political/cultural agent in a post-Cold War world while also being mobilised by governments and local authorities as a tool for gentrification and the tourist

[16] See Anthony Gardner and Charles Greed, ed., *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions That Created Contemporary Art*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2016.

economy.[17] The role of the international, freelance curator, while experimenting with new forms of fluid, roaming and morphing exhibition making that directly addressed processes of globalisation and their effects on urban realities, were also complicit in cultural and artistic practices functioning as a form of dematerialised, transnational capital.[18] Within the newly globalised art system the history of decolonisation and burgeoning postcolonial discourse was mobilised in a number of exhibitions as a means to critique and counter the white, Western-centric focus of the world's major art exhibitions and collections.[19] Equally, as Kate Fowle has noted the relationship between art projects and their context necessitated a heightened self-reflexivity in relation to place.[20]

[17] The founding of Manifesta is a clear example here. See Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic, *The Manifesta Decade*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006.

[18] For example, 'Cities on the Move', curated by Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist, which travelled to six venues from 1997 – 99.

[19] Exemplifying this turn are Okwui Enwezor's exhibitions 'The Short Century: A History of Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945 – 1994', Museum Villa Stuck, Munich, (9 February – 22 April 2001), House of World Cultures, Berlin (18 May – 29 July 2001) and MoMA PS1, New York (10 February – 5 May 2002) and documenta11, Kassel in 2002 premised on five platforms. The platforms, devoted to different themes were presented on four continents in advance of the exhibition: 'Democracy Unrealized' (Vienna, 15 March – 20 April 2001; Berlin, 9 – 30 October 2001), 'Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation' (New Delhi, 7 – 21 May 2001), 'Créolité and Creolization' (St. Lucia, 13 – 15 January 2002) and 'Under Siege: Four African Cities, Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, and Lagos' (Lagos, 16 – 20 March 2002) as well the exhibition itself. See https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta11#.

[20] Kate Fowle, 'Action Research: Generative Curatorial Practices', in Paul O'Neil and Mick Wilson, ed., *Curating Research*, Amsterdam and London: Open Editions, 2015, pp.153 – 72.

Since the 1990s a large bibliography of publications has been constructed on curating and the curatorial.[21] In contrast to articulation theory, discourse on the curatorial and its activities is not tied to a specific political genealogy, even if structuralist and post-structuralist writers are significant reference points due to their focus on informal knowledge. Rather, we

[21] A small selection of indicative texts and edited volumes includes: Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick, ed., *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol: Intellect, 2007, pp.13 – 28; Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, ed., Cultures of the Curatorial, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012; Jean-Paul Martinon, ed., *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013; Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, ed., *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, Cambridge, MA: MIT, 2010; Paul O'Neill, ed., *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam and London: De Appel and Open Editions, 2007. In addition, an expanding discourse on curating emerged that responded to the expansion of the art system during the 1990s via figures such as Viktor Misiano who produced the first Russian-language volume on curating, *Five lectures on Curatorship*, published by Garage Publishing Program / Ad Marginem Press in 2015. Other significant contributions to the discourse on curating and the curatorial include the collective What, How & For Whom (WHW) who have reframed curating and the production of exhibitions by calling for a consideration of the economic and labour conditions implicit in the conceptualisation and realisation of exhibitions. A major manifestation of this approach to curating was the 11th Istanbul Biennial titled 'What Keeps Mankind Alive?' in 2009. Zdenka Badovinac's directorship of the Moderna galerija in Ljubljana has been crucial in developing the field of curating and the role of institutions in the shifting geopolitical landscape of the 1990s. See Zdenka Badovinac, *Comradeship: Curating, Art, and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2019. Major contributions to the discourse on curating from a postcolonial framing were made by Okwui Enwezor's 2002 documenta11. See the exhibition guide Okwui Enwezor, ed., *Documenta11_Platform5*, Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2002. More recently curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung has explored curating and the curatorial form, from the perspective of the sonic and the body. See his recent collection of essays *In a While or Two We Will Find the Tone: Essays and Proposals, Curatorial Concepts and Critiques*, Berlin: Archive Books, 2020.

can say that curatorial discourse is produced by practitioners to understand, underpin and grow the field. One identifiable source for the emergence of this discourse within the English-speaking university context, and a focus for these reflections, is the Curatorial/Knowledge department established in 2004 at Goldsmith's, University of London. Founded by Irit Rogoff and Sarat Maharaj, it brought together international practitioners and is an addition to the MA in curating, a move to set it apart in terms of its capacity for 'knowledge production' rather than a practical set of skills.[22] The emphasis here is on these Curatorial/Knowledge department practitioners' claim of adopting an epistemological process that is transdisciplinary, as this intersects with theories of articulation. Rogoff, for instance, offers detailed descriptions of the curatorial, outlining in a conversation with academic Beatrice von Bismarck how she sees curating as a 'professional practice' and 'set of skills and practices, materials and institutional and infrastructural conditions' that go into the making of 'platforms of display' (exhibitions, public programming).[23]

[22] The term 'knowledge production' was first introduced by Sarat Maharaj in his essay for documenta11, for which he was part of the curatorial team. See Sarat Maharaj, 'XenoEpistemics: Makeshift Kit for Sounding Visual Art as Knowledge Production and the Retinal Regimes', in Heike Ander and Nadja Rottner, ed., *Documenta11_Platform 5: Exhibition*, Ostfildern, Germany: Hatje Cantz, 2002, pp.71 – 84.

[23] Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial', in Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski, ed., Cultures of the Curatorial, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012, p. 21.

For Rogoff curating operates within the field of representation. In contrast, the curatorial is a 'trajectory of activity' and an 'epistemic structure':

> It is a series of existing knowledges that come together momentarily to produce what we are calling the event of knowledge; a moment in which different knowledges interac[t] with one another to produce something that transcends their position as knowledge. […] The curatorial seems to be an ability to think everything that goes into the event of knowledge in relation to one another.[24]

What Rogoff defines as a 'trajectory', rather than an outcome, is a process resistant to forms of representation. This resistance holds affinities with some of the central claims of cultural studies and articulation. As Slack notes, the epistemological thrust of articulation 'is a way of thinking the structures of what we know as a play of correspondences, non-correspondences and contradictions, as fragments in the constitution of what we take to be unities'.[25] The emphasis on the curatorial as epistemological process is shared by others, including the artist Sarah Pierce, who writes on '[u]nderstanding how engagements with knowledge

[24] Ibid.
[25] Slack, 'Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies', p. 117.

production emerge as practice and how practice moves through and effects codes that order, at any given time, the procedures, methodologies, systems and institutions that bring knowledge into being, are central to understanding the curatorial'.[26]

Pierce writes:

> To think about radical formations of knowledge that occur through the curatorial is to undo its functional, structural relationship to curating – whether as a potential methodology or as a mode of operating – so that we might begin to address the curatorial as a political engagement, as it connects to knowledge production in ways that are neither good nor bad, but are unpredictable and difficult to manage.[27]

A similar understanding of the curatorial is put forward by curator and writer Simon Sheikh, who states:

> What is implied here, and also what is at stake in a more general and political sense, is the curatorial as a specific system of knowledge production and its relation to other forms of research and an overall research culture – and thus to the relationship

[26] Sarah Pierce, 'The Simple Operator', in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, p. 99.
[27] *Ibid.*

> between knowledge and power – and, moreover, between knowing and unknowing and what this means in relation to empowering subjects, groups and movements.[28]

While the claims of the curatorial as an epistemological process, rather than an outcome-based set of skills is appealing, it needs to be tempered with an acknowledgement of how 'knowledge production' rhetoric is allied with post-Fordist, dematerialised modes of capitalist production and neoliberal educational policies. As curator and academic Tom Holert has convincingly argued, the move towards the concept of knowledge production encourages new forms of measuring and accumulating that is complicit in these policies, particularly with the increasingly privatised educational sector.[29]

Rogoff 's understanding of the epistemological nature of the curatorial is grounded in a belief that the concept emerged from what she describes as an 'epistemological crisis':

> For both curating and the curatorial, the notion of an epistemological crisis is paramount, since they are

[28] Simon Sheikh, 'Towards the Exhibition as Research', in *Curating Research*, p. 35.
[29] Tom Holert, 'Art in the Knowledge-based Polis', *e-flux Journal*, no. 3 (February 2009), https://www.e-flux.com/journal/03/68537/art-in-the-knowledge-based-polis/.

> largely fields grounded in a series of work-protocols with little cumulative history or a body of stable empirical or theoretical knowledge at their disposal. Thus, the temptation to hurriedly build up a body of named and applicable knowledge that would dignify the field is probably great.[30]

Here Rogoff acknowledges the discursive field of curating and the curatorial as nascent. She also describes the wish to construct a discourse or body of knowledge to bolster a burgeoning field. Rather than an 'epistemological crisis', I would suggest that discourse on the curatorial emerges out of an epistemological space. According to Rogoff, the curatorial is an 'event of knowledge', a momentary coming together of existing knowledges. Its transitory nature aligns with what Stuart Hall calls the moment of 'arbitrary closure' when a position is articulated momentarily before coming apart and being rearticulated differently.[31] Rogoff notes: 'Our work on the "Curatorial/Knowledge" programme addressed precisely such an epistemological crisis, one in which we would not determine which knowledges went into the work of curating

[30] Irit Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field', in The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating, p. 43.
[31] Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler, ed., *Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 280.

but would insist on a new set of relations between those knowledges.'[32] In this sense curatorial discourse, like theories of articulation as Slack underscores, emphasises being contingent on a given conjuncture.

Beatrice von Bismarck sees curating and the curatorial as closely aligned, wherein the 'activities involved in curating [are] representative, in their connectivity, of the general constellational structure of the curatorial'. Von Bismarck does not want to exclude the exhibition itself (considered the primary site of 'curating') from the curatorial: 'The curatorial then defines the larger frame within which the exhibition – having its own processes of constitution, reception, and distribution – develops into an argument. Curating and the curatorial thus work into one another.'[33] Rogoff in turn wants to insist on a 'strategic difference' between the curatorial and curating, the former being a 'mode of knowledge production', the latter a 'mode of getting things done'.[34] While Rogoff claims she does not want to make a qualitative difference between the two, it is clear that she views the curatorial as a more expanded practice with greater epistemological potential than the more operational act of curating exhibitions, public programmes, etc.

[32] Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field', p. 44.
[33] Rogoff and Von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial', p. 22.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Practitioners within the curatorial and articulation both see their respective practices as being transdisciplinary in nature. Rogoff writes:

> On the other hand, the dominant trans-disciplinarity of the expanded field of art and cultural production has entailed equal amounts of researching, investigating, inventing archives from which we can read in more contemporary ways, finding new formats, self-instituting, educating, organizing and sharing. Most interestingly, it has dictated that each idea or concept we take up must be subjected to pressures from other modes of knowledge and of knowing – it cannot simply stay within its own comfortable paradigm and celebrate itself and its achievements. And so in this other context, the expanding field is one of broader contemporary knowledge bases and practices.[35]

Rogoff takes this further by stating: 'This mode of knowledge production is in pursuit of not just trans-disciplinarity, but really undreamed knowledge, where bits of knowledge

[35] Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field', p. 45.

re-singularize themselves with other bits of knowledge in order to produce and constitute new subjects in the world.'[36] Such a conception seems to me close to an articulating principle where concepts are linked to others to produce new meaning. Or, as cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg writes in relation to articulation, it 'links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics'.[37]

The curatorial, as a discipline like theories of articulation sees itself as trans disciplinary, can encompassing a range of activities and trajectories. Of course, such a position is harder to maintain with the many postgraduate degrees around curating and the curatorial becoming embedded within the university as distinct disciplines. This is true to an even larger extent with cultural studies. What began in the 1960s as a small department in Birmingham overtime grew within a number of universities and then expanded dramatically when it was taken up in the US. Its self-understanding as a field and set of practices across and between other disciplines was eventually untenable.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 54.

At the same time, both fields use their transdisciplinary nature to elude self-definition. Slack's assertion that articulation is a 'process of making connections' between things means that it always operates in what she describes as 'the seams'. Equally important to understand is cultural theorists' insistence that theories and practices of articulation, can't be pinned down; they are constantly changing and therefore definitions remain impossible to fix. Or, as Slack says: 'The process of citing the space as a terrain for theorizing accounts to some extent for the difficulties and resistance – that still exist – in pointing to what exactly articulation is. The point is that it isn't exactly anything.'[38]

The curatorial is similarly reluctant to pin down a clear definition for itself. In 'The Simple Operator', Pierce asks: 'Is the curatorial a condition? A device? Is it a field or subject? How does it claim certain conventions around curating, while also claiming that one operates differently through the curatorial?' She then offers some helpful definitions:

a. The curatorial needs interrogation independently of curating;
b. The curatorial may or may not be a field of study or even a subject;

[38] Slack, 'Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies', p. 120.

c. The curatorial is not a domain or a discipline where one can gain expertise;
d. The curatorial produces in different ways, including theoretical and material.[39]

Relationship to Theory

Both theories of articulation and the curatorial draw heavily on theory, but neither are theoretical domains in their own right. Hall consistently talks about theory being useful in cultural studies as something you need to 'shake off ' or to help move you a 'little further along down the road'.[40] It is essentially a loose relationship because the central concern lies in analysing specific social formations or phenomena. The curatorial also has an unresolved relationship with theory. The title of Martinon's book *The Philosophy of Curating*, Rogoff 's insistence on the curatorial operating in an epistemological crisis, and the frequent turn to post-structuralism, are all symptoms of the curatorial making a claim for having a relationship to theory. Yet, as I have repeatedly stressed, this relationship is fluid.

[39] Pierce, 'The Simple Operator', p. 98.
[40] Hall, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', p. 280.

While articulation comes out of the theoretical genealogy of Western Marxism and wants to 'shake off' theory by linking concepts to the concrete, the curatorial could be seen to work in the opposite direction. It uses theory to underpin its claims on epistemological process and to position itself apart from the more skill-based curating. The curatorial aligns itself with the open-endedness of meaning within post-structuralism and considerations of how and on what terms knowledge is formed. Indeed, Michel Foucault's notion of non-formal knowledge is cited by Pierce and others as foundational for the very notion of Curatorial Knolwedge.[41]

Researching Histories in the Making

The premise of Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson's publication Curating Research is to delve further into what they see as the relatively unchallenged relationship between the curatorial and research. In the introduction they argue that the curatorial

[41] In 'The Simple Operator' Pierce writes: In the English edition of *The Order of Things* begins with Foucault asking, by way of hypothesis, what if empirical knowledge, with all of the speculations, distortions, old beliefs and practices, errors, naive notions, as well as genuine discoveries, obeyed "the laws of a certain code of knowledge?" Taking this premise as a basis for thinking about curatorial knowledge, that is, knowledge produced through an engagement with the curatorial, how might we account for all of the discursive layers in an exhibition that fall outside the intentions and designs set forth in word and deed by the curator? Pierce, 'The Simple Operator', p.100

and certain understandings of research have become aligned, moving past an understanding of the exhibition as 'curating-as-production'.[42] Central to this is a resistance to a subject being researched and then those findings being presented in the output of an exhibition, publication, public programme, etc. Rather, in Wilson and O'Neill's observations, contemporary curatorial practices fold these processes together with the subject and object of study, bringing them together in close relation. It charts how this relationship is manifest via case studies rather than the precise working-through of a thesis, underpinning the curatorial as a practice-led discipline.

In a somewhat similar vein cultural studies does not separate the subject of study from the study itself. This is perhaps most clear in the way that Slack describes the question of context in cultural studies:

> Seen from this perspective, this is what a cultural study does: map the context – not in the sense of situating a phenomenon in a context, but in mapping a context, mapping the very identity that brings the context into focus. […] To put it another way, the context is not something out there, within which practices occur or

[42] See O'Neill and Wilson, *Curating Research*, p. 12.

> which influence the development of practices. Rather, identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context within which there are practices, identities or effects.[43]

Both disciplines position themselves as contemporary practices that strategically intervene in urgent arguments or disciplines. This approach defines Rogoff 's understanding of the curatorial. She writes that it is vital that the curatorial 'finds ways of conceptually entering contemporary urgencies rather than commenting upon them'.[44] Similarly, one of the premises of articulation is that social structures are contingent, in flux and constantly moving. Cultural studies insists on being able to articulate a position in a moment of 'arbitrary closure' before rearticulating it based on a new conjuncture. The practice is premised on looking, experiencing and analysing things as they arrive. The same premise drives Rogoff 's claim to 'take up' certain urgencies rather than comment on them. This working with and through urgencies and events as they unfold, as well as their self-understanding as a form of intervention, is another point of comparison between articulation and the curatorial.

[43] Slack, 'Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies', p. 125.
[44] Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field', p. 47.

Conclusion

While acknowledging the various ideological and political positions of theories of articulation and discourses on the curatorial, I have attempted to identify and draw together what I feel are the most significant observations surrounding the two fields. Both make claims to enact an epistemological process that draws form different fields, and that is contingent. I have also observed the contrast in ideological genealogy between the two discourses and the practical application of these discourses. Within the context of my own research project that examines nationalisms and internationalisms in the 1990s, the task now seems to be to think how theories of articulation might be mobilised within a curatorial practice.

Introduction: 'The Place is Here. The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain'

Authors	Nick Aikens and Elizabeth Robles
From	*The Place is Here. The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*
Publisher	Sternberg Press, Berlin and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Editors	Nick Aikens and Elizabeth Robles
Year	2019

Donald Rodney, *Britannia Hospital 2*, 1998

Donald Rodney's *Britannia Hospital 2* (1988) is comprised of a grid of 24 X-rays of the artist's body, in the centre of which is a painting of a man. A small flame burns in his right palm. The image is based on a 1976 photograph taken during the Soweto uprisings in apartheid South Africa. Part of a series presented at the Chisenhale Gallery, London in 1989, the work evokes Britain as sick patient. It calls at once for resistance to and diagnosis of a deeply divided nation suffering from a self-inflicted illness wrought by Margaret Thatcher's conservative government and its support for the racist regime in South Africa. The work is also a self-portrait: the X-rays evidence the debilitating sickle cell disease that would tragically take Rodney's life 10 years later at only 36. Rodney forged an indelible connection between himself and black South African resistance in this work, binding the stories and struggles across the African diaspora. At the same time, the use of X-rays and a painted found photograph complicates our understanding of what it means to see and represent: a body, a life, a political struggle. For Rodney, like so many artists working in Britain in the 1980s, the racial and political emanated from the personal, the subjective and the bodily.

This publication takes as its starting point a series of four exhibitions from 2016-17 in the Netherlands and Britain that presented the work of black artists working in Britain during the 1980s. The first, 'Thinking Back: A Montage of Black Art in Britain', was the final chapter in a larger exhibition titled *The 1980s. Today's Beginnings?* at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in 2016. The exhibition subsequently evolved into a standalone presentation when it arrived in Britain under the revised title *The Place Is Here* at Nottingham Contemporary, before being presented concurrently at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA) and the South London Gallery, all 2017. The four exhibitions were not originally conceived as a series; each was adapted to the size and context of the four venues and allowed for the inclusion of new material and ongoing research. In this introduction and throughout the book, *The Place Is Here* refers to the four exhibitions collectively. This book is the result of the many conversations, reflections and questions that arose with artists, scholars and the public across the exhibitions and provides some means to contribute to a hugely significant moment of art and cultural history that remains woefully under-represented in mainstream art history and within the wider public consciousness. As the numerous contributions attest, the primary focus here lies with the artworks and archives presented, and the ideas they give rise to. The forms of image making and the materials, texts and archives they draw on speak back to the personal, cultural and political conditions out of which they arose – conditions that resonate profoundly across the many contours of our present moment.

The wider research project that underpinned the exhibitions began in late 2014 as part of a collaborative curatorial project across five European institutions that aimed to chart the 1980s as a moment of profound change that has come to shape various aspects of our current historical conjuncture.[1] *The 1980s. Today's Beginnings?* did this by looking to different cultural contexts in Europe, the exhibition's broad geopolitical focus, to un-derstand the shifts that took place in the way governments and their publics understood one another, and artists' responses to or prediction of that change. Whether during the transition in post-Franco Spain, the last years of Yugoslavia following the death of Tito, the writing of a new constitution in Turkey or the emergence of neoliberalism and creeping nationalist-populism in Thatcherite Britain, a fundamental reorientation took place in people's understanding of the state and its government, and responsibility towards its subjects. Within this context new and diverse subjectivities, forms of expression and cultural organisation emerged intent on being heard and felt across the public sphere. At the same time, the dominance of the white, heterosexual male within art and its institutions was thrown into question as pressure mounted to reflect the diverse public they were sup-posed to serve. In Britain, as elsewhere, the prejudice of art schools as well as museums and their funding mechanisms were exposed by those who were being excluded. The work needed to undo these profound structural injustices remains unfinished.

When a group of young art students issued a clarion call for a gathering in Wolverhampton in 1982 to debate the 'form, future and function of black art' the exchanges that emerged over the course of the day were heated and unresolved. None of the packed hall of artists, which included emerging members of the 1980s generation alongside already established artists such as Frank Bowling and Errol Lloyd, could agree on what constituted 'black art' or whether the term held currency for them at all. Despite these tensions and debates, as recently as 2005, Keith Piper, a member of the group that came to be known as the Blk Art Group and co-organiser of the First National Black Art Convention, asserted: 'the 1980s ... remain for us a troubling decade. They seem to be presented as the source of a fully formed and uncontested narrative package. [...] Particularly disturbing for me is the easy and unreflective use of two grand narrative terms: black art and the Black Arts

1 The 1980s was a key area of research for the partner institutions in the European museum confederation L'Internationale, of which the Van Abbemuseum is a partner. See www.internationaleonline.org. This resulted in numerous exhibitions across the institutions and a collaborative publication. See Nick Aikens, Teresa Grandes, Nav Haq, Beatriz Herráez and Nataša Petrešin-Bachlez (eds), *The Long 1980s: Constellations of Art, Politics and Identities. A Collection of Microhistories* (Amsterdam: Valiz and L'Internationale, 2018).

Movement.'[2] Departing from these monologic 'narrative packages', the impulse that drove the exhibitions, and this publication, was to reflect the varied, often conflicting dialogues that took place among artists, thinkers, exhibition makers and organisers.

While the project is situated within the specific historical conjuncture of the 1980s, neither the exhibitions nor the book were conceived chronologically. It seems conceptually and strategically limiting to mark a beginning, end or sequential movement through the work of black artists in the 1980s. Equally, the titles of the various exhibition presentations and this volume do not refer to the 'Black Art Movement', a label that emerged as early as the 1980s and has since been used as a shorthand for a vast set of practices and ideas put forward by black artists working in Britain during that decade. Eschewing the fixity of both chronology and the naming of a movement, *The Place Is Here* opens up space for the vastly different positions of the 1980s that sought to negotiate the boundaries and interstices of Black nationalism, postcolonialism and anti-colonialism, black feminism, black queer subjectivity, anti-Thatcherism, psychoanalysis, cultural studies, forms of narrative and documentary image making, as well as modes of representation at large, across different forms of media. Of course, this took place not only in practice but also in conjunction with self-organised exhibitions, conferences, publishing and archiving. Though there were some clear groupings (like the Blk Art Group) and collective working processes, these associations were loose. The diverse interests and activities of artists across the decade and beyond made it impossible to identify a singular self-defined movement with a clear unified set of aims. We can find the hallmarks of the avant-garde 'ism' in the manifestos, pamphlets and publications of the period. But their authorship and distribution highlights still more the blurred lines that might otherwise demarcate who was 'in' and who was 'out'. Like a complex, shifting Venn diagram the concerns of black artists in Britain during the 1980s at times intersected, only to reconfigure with different relationships at play. To try and fix these concerns or categorise them would be to deny the fluidity that defined their formation. This is not to say that the term 'Black Arts Movement' is entirely absent from this publication and some authors have opted to use the term, though it is often with a qualification that reflects its porous edges.

2 Keith Piper, 'Wait, Did I Miss Something? Some Personal Musings on the 1980s and Beyond', in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, eds David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 36.

Similarly, as editors – a white man and a woman of colour – we are aware of the complexities of naming 'black artists' in the title of the book (a categorisation that was consciously omitted from the title of the exhibitions after the first iteration), knowing that for many to do so is to fall prey to a form of classification that reinforces the category of race and therefore racial division. For others it is vital to name blackness precisely to emphasise the lived experience of racial inequality.

Equally fraught with the difficulties of naming and thereby fixing categories, is the nomen-clature of B/black. In his seminal 1988 essay 'New Ethnicities', Stuart Hall offers a cogent and relevant definition of the term within the context of 1980s Britain:

> The term 'black' is used as a way of referencing the common experience of racism and marginalization in Britain, which came to provide the category of a new politics of resistance, among groups and communities with, in fact, very different histories, traditions, and ethnic identities. [...] These formed the conditions of resistance of a cultural politics designed to challenge, resist, and, where possible, transform the dominant regimes of representation – first in music and style and later in literary, visual and cinematic forms.[3]

Foregrounding a specifically British context, and speaking to the struggle for representation at the centre of the black arts scene at the time, he speaks to a formation of black other than the Black-ness (with a capital B), which is most commonly associated with certain forms of Black Nationalism and Black Power emanating principally from the United States. While Hall's definition specifically refers to a 'politics of resistance', it recognises the multiplicity of voices and backgrounds within that position and differentiates the politics of race and colonialism produced on either side of the Atlantic. However, it's equally important to recognise that throughout the 1980s and beyond, this definition of 'black' has remained unfixed. Indeed, a number of spaces, exhibitions and publications from the 1980s located themselves firmly within the specificities of the African diaspora, as Pan-Africanist discourses and American ideologies of Black Power circulated through what Paul Gilroy has called the 'Black Atlantic'. Indeed, the use of 'Black' to more closely align with a unified political struggle can be seen in the early activities of the Blk Art Group, who wrote in 1981:

3 Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', ICA Documents 7, 'Black Film British Cinema' (1988), p. 27.

> The group believes that Black Art – which is what they call their art – must respond to the realities of the local, national and international Black communities. It must focus its attention on the elements which characterise ... the existence of Black people. In doing so, they believe that Black Art can make a vital contribution to a unifying Black culture which, in turn, develops the political thinking of Black people.[4]

We align our understanding of the term black with Hall's, referring to a diverse constellation of artists living in Britain with different backgrounds of African, Caribbean and South Asian descent who through their practice contribute to 'a politics of resistance'. Across the texts, however, some authors use the term 'Black' and 'Black Art' to allude to the desire for a 'unifying Black culture'. As in the 1980s, these terms remain contested and, perhaps inevitably, artists took up a wide range of positions within and sometimes against their frameworks; for some, an alignment with Black struggle was foundational, while for others it was subsumed by other interests and motivations. These debates, like so many at stake within the work and ideas presented in *The Place Is Here*, remain productively unresolved. As such, we offered authors the freedom to determine the nomenclature within each text, using the terms – black, Black or Black Art – they felt most closely aligned with their work and the work of the artists under discussion.

The publication is structured around four strands: thematic essays, close readings of works, panel discussions and archival presentations. One specific aim is to bring together different voices and generational perspectives from the artists themselves and established scholars to younger practitioners, art historians and critics working today. The opening texts in the book directly address the exhibitions, beginning with 'We Will Be' by artist and researcher susan pui san lok. Part poem, personal response and rallying call, the text is structured around the title of Lubaina Himid's eponymous 1986 work, which was also the title of the second room in the Nottingham version of the exhibition. The words unfold with emotional and political solidarity, speaking to and with a series of artworks, the images that emanate from them and the stories they tell. In 'A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1980s', co-editor (and co-author of this introduction) and curator of *The Place Is Here*, Nick Aikens, reflects on what it means to 'articulate' the 1980s, both via the artworks themselves and in exhibitions. He draws on the productive double meaning of articulate – to speak

4 Press release for Blk Art 'n Done, Wolverhampton Art Gallery, June 1981.

forth and to link – and theories of articulation developed in cultural studies in the 1970s and '80s. Through this Aikens revisits works, their critical readings and the format of the exhibition to make a case for this group of artists as constituting what theorist Louis Althusser described as a 'complex unity'. Art historian Deborah Cherry assesses *The Place Is Here* exhibition from different curatorial perspectives looking at the approach to 'Research', 'Montage', 'Black Art', 'Archives' and 'The Here and Now' within the different iterations of the project. Offering a far-reaching analysis of *The Place Is Here*, both what was included and what was left out, Cherry places the exhibition within the context of different curatorial and institutional initiatives focusing on black artists in the 1980s. She concludes with the tacit acknowledgement that despite this timely upsurge in interest there remains so much more to be presented, written, archived and collected.

The art history taught in art schools in the 1980s was the exclusive domain of white, pre-dominantly male, European and American artists. The following two contributions aim to assess the work and the exhibition from the perspective of a discipline that has had to undergo substantial and necessary revisions since the 1980s. The first of the panel discussions 'Encounters with Art History' with curators Priyesh Mistry and Laura Castagnini and art historians Elizabeth Robles and Alice Correia assess the way in which artists in the 1980s negotiated art's histories, looking at once to the white, Western-centric canon and to the histories constructed by black artists in Britain and further afield, and the ways in which these negotiations are constructed within the context of the exhibition. Following this, Robles's text 'Reframing Art History' examines the way in which work by black artists in the 1980s demands a reappraisal of conventional approaches to art history. Looking to Marlene Smith's 1987 work *Art History*, Robles makes the case for a 'polyvocal' approach that calls for 'a recalibration of the discipline' that foregrounds personal relationships, non-linear trajectories and feminist principles.

A central focus of *The Place Is Here* has been the wish to foreground artworks and the manner in which they operate as images, discourse and archives. For the book we invited artists, art historians and critics to select works of their choice from the exhibitions as the focus for close readings. For the first of these, artist and researcher Sonia Boyce takes Rasheed Araeen's *For Oluwale* (1971 – 3/5) and Eddie Chambers's now iconic *Destruction of the National Front* (1979 – 80). Acknowledging the need to reconcile an interpretation of the work's aesthetic strategies of collage and montage with their very direct political address to racism and nationalism in 1970s Britain, Boyce heralds these two pieces as announc-

ing, 'the beginning of a discourse in Black Art in the United Kingdom'. Art historian Amna Malik looks at Gavin Jantjes's 11-part series *A South African Colouring Book* (1974-5), produced when the South African artist was in diaspora working in Hamburg and shown at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1978. Malik offers precise and reveal-ing citations of the sources of Jantjes's images as well as a striking analysis of the work in relation to Pop artist Joe Tilson and calls our attention to the 'temporal and spatial disjuncture between British Pop and South African resistance art'. Art historian Dorothy Price's text on Lubaina Himid's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1987) places the work within the sociopolitical climate of Thatcher's Britain. Offering close readings of the many newspaper clippings that were pasted onto the britches of the leader of the Haitian revolution, Price similarly sees the technique of montage as embodying the fractured, divided nature of the country at that time.

The second of the four panel discussions turns to the use and role of the archive in art-works and in forming cultural memory related to black artists. Artists Marlene Smith and Samia Malik, curator and archivist June Givanni, and Nick Aikens discuss their respective relationship to archives, how they appear in the works and what happens when archives become formalised and institutionalised in an exhibition such as *The Place Is Here*. In 'Bearing Witness' sociologist Gail Lewis and artists Michelle Williams Gamaker and Sunil Gupta take two artworks: Gupta's *'Pretended' Family Relationships* (1988) and Black Audio Film Collective's *Twilight City* (1989) to discuss the manner in which artists, particularly those working in lens-based practices simultaneously wrote, recorded and took apart the unfolding history they were living. Lewis closes by speaking of the simultaneous warn-ing and invitation these works make: 'Look, look, look', she says. 'We do this. We inhabit these spaces. We shift you. We provide spaces to think about being and becoming other, something we couldn't imagine we could be.'

The sense of bearing witness is carried forward in art historian Leon Wainwright's study of Mona Hatoum's 1985 performance Roadworks on the streets of Brixton in South London, the site of political uprisings that year. Wainwright's personal response to the piece, and the artist's subsequent *Measures of Distance* (1988) calls attention to the manifold relationships at stake in the work: between the artist and those witnessing her performance, that of mother and daughter that forms the focus of the second film, or the relationship Hatoum forges with the viewer that fluctuates between intimacy and staged distance. Writer Chandra Frank reads *Dreaming Rivers* (1988) directed by Martina Attille and produced by Sankofa Film and Video Collective as a weaving together of 'diaspora,

intimacy and kinship' through the narrative of Miss T. Writing as Frank says *with* the film, rather than to it allows her to consider its resonance today and what 'remains' of her story. In the last of the close readings, Ashwani Sharma looks at three works: Said Adrus's *Zeitgeist* (1982 – 3), Chila Kumari Burman's *Convenience Not Love* (1986 – 7) and Pratibha Parmar's *Sari Red* (1988). Assessing the works of South Asian artists via the aesthetics of montage and collage, techniques readily associated with artists during the decade, Sharma asks how these three works 'open up multiple postcolonial histories, temporalities and cultural translations'. In the final panel discussion artists Claudette Johnson, Rehana Zaman and Collective Creativity members Evan Ifekoya, Raisa Kabir and Raju Rage consider the ways in which questions of identification, classification and collective practice have evolved since the 1980s. While reflecting on the conditions of producing art, both individually and collectively, that have changed, the discussion moves to new sites of contestation that have undoubtedly emerged for black artists.

Since the first iteration of the exhibition in Eindhoven, the inclusion of different archives has played an important role in trying to mediate the work that was taking place away from the artist's studio. From the First National Black Art Convention in 1982 to countless exhibitions, screenings, workshops and symposia, a significant part of *the work* in the 1980s was finding ways and means to initiate a public dialogue. Similarly, processes of archiving, what photographer Vanley Burke would describe as participating in the making of history, was taking place amongst the artists, curators and organisers themselves as a way to overcome the blind spots of mainstream institutions. The book therefore includes presentations of some of the key documents and material presented in the exhibition from the following archives: Burke's collection (in collaboration with Burke), Brixton Art Gallery Archive (in collaboration with Andrew Hurman), Blk Art Group Research Project (curated by Claudette Johnson, Keith Piper and Marlene Smith), Making Histories Visible Archive (curated by Lubaina Himid), June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive (curated by June Givanni) and African-Caribbean, Asian & African Art in Britain Archive at Chelsea College of Art.

History, and art history is no exception, is ultimately dependent on the people, places and positions from which it is told. Thankfully, as Deborah Cherry notes in her contribution here, *The Place Is Here* can be seen as part of a growing interest and set of projects devoted to black artists in 1980s Britain. With them they bring different approaches to art and history that challenge preceding contributions and take understanding in new directions. Though any selection of works and archival ephem-

era can, in a sense, produce a linear quasi-genealogy of a monological narrative – writing some artists, artworks and activities into the historical frame, and leaving others out – there is no roll call for the historical record here. With this in mind, we also acknowledge the many omissions produced by the book and the exhibitions to which it responds. These were the result of curatorial and editorial blind spots rather than tactical exclusions. When the edges of an area of study are blurred and porous, things inevitably slip out of view and no doubt future projects will redress this project’s undoubted imbalances. So, while neither the book nor the exhibitions that it arises from were intended or made claims to offer a definitive view, it is crucial to acknowledge that it is not untouched by the process and elisions of history building. *The Place Is Here* remains rooted in the firm belief that many more exhibitions, books and research projects are required in order to counter and subsequently enrich the knowledge it puts forward. There is simply too much work yet to be done and, though it is heartening to see the current surge in academic and institutional activity around these artists and the 1980s more broadly, it is crucial that it does not precipitate an ebbing interest in a still narrow field. The questions these artists, artworks and histories pose remain pressing. This work must continue in the present and for a future: *The Place Is Here*, the Time Is Now.

The 1980s: Today’s Beginnings, installation view with with works by Rasheed Araeen and Sonia Boyce, Van Abbemuseum, 2016

The Place is Here, installation view of *Fashionalbe Marriage* (1986) by Lubaina Himid, Nottingham Contemporary, 2017

The Place is Here, installation view with works by Rasheed Araeen, Mona Hatoum, Lubaina Himid and Gavin Jantjes, South London Gallery, 2017

The Place is Here, installation view with works by Eddie Chambers, Mona Hatoum and Gavin Jantjes, Middlesborough Institute of Modern Art, 2017

A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1990s

Author	Nick Aikens
From	*The Place is Here. The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*
Publisher	Sternberg Press, Berlin and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven
Editors	Nick Aikens and Elizabeth Robles
Year	2019

A larger than life figure in a blue army jacket stands painted and collaged onto a thin, crudely cut-out piece of wood. Hand over heart, its left shoulder is covered in drawing pins to create an extravagant golden epaulette. Emblazoned above the figure is the name 'Toussaint L'Ouverture' – with 1743 and 1803 on either side of its head – leader of the first successful uprising against slavery: the Haitian Revolution (1791 – 1804). Toussaint L'Ouverture appears proud and defiant. The jacket is a patchwork of strips of blue paper, trousers and knee-high boots a sea of newspaper clippings littered with images of then British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. The words 'Torture', 'Racist' and 'Abuse' jump out; one headline reads 'Asian Community Ignored'. Next to the figure, handwritten in black capital letters: 'This news wouldn't be news if you had heard of Toussaint L'Ouverture.'

I stood before Lubaina Himid's *Toussaint L'Ouverture* (1987) on 17 June 2017. It was the first work visitors encountered in a single gallery iteration of *The Place Is Here*, due to open that day at the Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA).[1] It was also three days after the horrific events of the Grenfell Tower fire in West London where 72 people lost their lives in a column of flames.[2] The words 'community ignored' stuck. Elsewhere in the gallery I reread the harrowing lines in Maud Sulter's collage *Nightmare* (1985) amongst blackened, singed paper:

> thick chokeing smoke
> bolts me awake
> pound at the bedding
> sharp licking flames.
> Who lit the fire
> who fanned the flames?[3]

Lubaina Himid
Toussaint L'Ouverture

Maud Sutter
Nightmare

1 *The Place Is Here*, curated by Nick Aikens and Sam Thorne with Nicola Guy, Nottingham Contemporary, 4 February – 1 May 2017. Further iterations followed at Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art (MIMA), 17 June – 8 October 2017 and South London Gallery, 22 June – 10 September 2017, both curated by Aikens. The exhibition expanded on 'Thinking Back: A Montage of Black Art in Britain', the final chapter in *The 1980s. Today's Beginnings?*, curated by Aikens and Diana Franssen with Zdenka Bodavinac, Teresa Grandas, Merve Elveren and Fefa Vila Nunez, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 16 April – 25 September 2016.

2 On 14 June 2017 the Grenfell Tower fire in a tower block in North West London resulted in 72 deaths. An investigation into the tragedy began on 14 September 2017, and, at the time of writing, is ongoing. The rapid spread of the fire, believed to have been started by a malfunctioning fridge freezer on the fourth floor, was caused by the exterior cladding of the building, added in 2012. Following the fire, residents complained that their repeated concerns around the safety of the building had been ignored.

3 In 2014, artist Marlene Smith got in touch with Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery regarding three works by Sulter: *Nightmare, In the Ever Presence of the Enemy* and *As a Blackwoman* (all 1985). The works were listed in the artist's records as being acquired by the Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery. After repeated exchanges with museum staff the works were eventually found in the museum's depot. During conversations with Deborah Cherry (curator of Maud Sulter: Passion, Street Level Photoworks, Glasgow, 25 April – 21 June 2015 and editor of the publication of the same name) and Smith for *The 1980s. Today's Beginnings?*, I was made aware of the location of the three works, meaning they could be included in both the Nottingham Contemporary and MIMA versions of *The Place Is Here*.

Toussaint and *Nightmare* spoke back, with fierce clarity, from the mid-1980s to my present. They reaffirmed in that horrific week in Britain that the wilful neglect of communities by those in power is not a thing of the past. It also reaffirmed, with biting sadness, that history is the genealogy of the present: it will always reverberate and reappear years later in a different guise.

'Under Certain Conditions': Approaching the Art and Politics of the 1980s

This essay explores what it means to 'articulate' the 1980s, both for black artists working 30 years ago and from the perspective of today. I shall draw – as Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg and other cultural studies practitioners of the 1970s and '80s did – on the generative double meaning of 'articulate': according to Hall '"articulate" means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc.',[4] what black feminist Audre Lorde wrote in 1984 as finding 'the word you do not yet have'.[5] The second meaning articulate holds is as a form of linkage. Hall famously used the example of the articulated lorry 'where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage, that can be broken.' He summarises: *'An articulation is thus the form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions'*.[6] For black artists working during the 1980s, articulation in this sense entailed mapping, recording, embodying and speaking that took apart and reformulated the specificity of the personal, political and historical conjuncture in which they lived. Himid's term 'gathering and reusing', which shares affinity with so many of the strategies applied in the works in *The Place Is Here*, immediately links the dual meanings of articulation. 'Gathering and reusing', she writes 'is like poetry, a gathering of words, sounds, rhythms and a reusing of them in a unique order to highlight, pinpoint and precisely express'. However, she goes on to write that 'each piece within the piece has its own past and its own contribution to the new whole, the new function'.[7] On the one hand the strategy of gathering and reusing is a means to express, to articulate.

4 Stuart Hall, interviewed by Lawrence Grossberg, 'On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall', ed. Lawrence Grossberg, *Journal of Communication and Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2, p. 45.

5 Audre Lorde, 'The Transformation of Silence into Action', in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed Press, 1984), p. 41.

6 Hall, 'On Postmodernism', p. 45.

7 Gilane Tawadros,'Beyond the Boundary: The Work of Three Black Women Artists in Britain', in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds Houston A. Baker, Jr, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), p. 240.

On the other, it is a means to form a part of the total unity being presented – a linking device between different, though interrelated, parts. As I shall discuss later in the essay, theories of articulation, one of the key concepts and practices to emerge form cultural studies, asks how knowledge, discourse and ideology can be linked to concrete, lived experience at specific conjunctures, as well as how such ideology has the capacity to work on political subjects. Or, as Hall wrote: 'it enables us to think how an ideology empowers people, enabling them to begin to make some sense or intelligibility of their historical situation'.[8] It is the connection between ideology and lived experience, which rings out in so many of the works in *The Place Is Here* and which makes engaging with it today all the more compelling.

The 'certain conditions' of the 1980s, as Hall would argue following Antonio Gramsci, occurred at a moment at which both 'conjunctural' and 'organic' forces contributed to societal and cultural crisis in Thatcher's Britain. This crisis precipitated a response from artists and intellectuals that served as a form of resistance to the discrimination and exclusion across political and cultural life. At the same time, it served as a propelling, generative force that has produced some of the most enduring ideas and images of recent British cultural history. When viewed collectively as a constantly evolving network of propositions, they articulate – both 'speak forth' and link – the manner in which histories and identities are engaged. *The Place Is Here* arose out of a particular impulse to explore the significance of those 'certain conditions' for our present. The form of an exhibition, however, brings with it its own means through which to speak and link. This essay, therefore, offers some reflections on the manner in which the exhibition itself can be viewed as a form of articulation.

Among art historians and critics, recent debates on the work of black artists in the 1980s have stressed the need to attend to the work of art itself, rather than allowing interpretation to be over-determined by sociopolitical context or artist biographies. Artist Rasheed Araeen has been a long-standing champion of an aesthetic and art historical reading of works that could create a truly international art history, not one written in continual deference to the Western canon.[9] In her contribution to this volume, artist Sonia Boyce cites critic Jean Fisher's timely 1997 essay,

8 Tawadros, 'Beyond the Boundary', p. 240.

9 See Rasheed Araeen, 'New Internationalism. The Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans', in *Global Vision: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, ed. Jean Fisher (London: Kala Press with Institute of International Visual Arts, 1994). For a lengthier discussion on Araeen's contribution to these debates see Kate Fowle, 'Missing History', in Rasheed Araeen, ed. Nick Aikens (Zurich: JRP | Ringier, 2017).

'The Work Between Us' in which Fisher asks that 'we rethink the ways by which we frame art in order to return it to what is proper to art'.[10] Art historian Kobena Mercer's 2005 comment on the 'conceptual chaos and confusion as to what the primary object of attention actually is' redirected focus to the aesthetics and materiality of works.[11] *The Place Is Here* looked to allow for encounters with 1980s artworks as aesthetic, material objects or sets of images, by, for example, deciding to forgo chronological structure and instead create dialogues between artworks and their formal strategies. At Nottingham Contemporary, the four sections were titled after artworks to initiate gallery readings from the pieces – rather than the politics – on display. That said, the exhibition consciously took a specific historical, cultural and political moment – black artists in 1980s Britain – as its frame of reference. Moreover, the intention was to speak to, or perhaps with, that historical moment from the present, to articulate it with the here and now. The contextual specificity of artworks was not secondary to, but rather in constant dialogue with, the experience of the objects and images. Similarly, other authorial voices were invited to develop curated archive sections to widen the discussion around presentation, organisation and dissemination of work. The inclusion of these voices was also meant to underscore the persistent need to self-produce and narrate histories-in-the-making when mainstream institutional structures were, and in most cases still are, left badly wanting. As such, images and objects were viewed in concert with a wider set of political and cultural concerns.

In reflecting on this tension, I have come to lean on 'articulation' as a conceptual and theoretical device for engaging with the works and the exhibition. The works 'speak forth' through processes of montage, collage and assemblage. At the same time, articulation enables me to look beyond the formal qualities of these works to consider them as linking devices that allow for their different political and cultural impulses and to create theorist Louis Althusser's notion of a 'complex unity'.

10 Jean Fisher, 'The Work Between Us', in *Trade Routes: History + Geography*, exhibition catalogue for second edition of the Johannesburg Biennale curated by Okwui Enwezor (Johannesburg: Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, 1997), pp. 20 – 3.

11 Kobena Mercer, 'Iconography After Identity', in *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, eds David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), p. 52. Mercer's call is cited by Boyce in the introductory text to the research project *Black Artists & Modernism* (BAM, 2015 – 18) funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) as a collaboration between University of the Arts London and Middlesex University London. BAM's stated aim was to 'address the understated connections and areas of contention between Black-British artists' practice and the work of art's relationship to Modernism through close readings of works of art, artist dossiers, interviews, study days, public symposia and a database of works of art in public collections across the UK'. See http://www.blackartists-modernism.co.uk/ about/, (accessed 12 October 2018).

‘The Great Moving Right Show’

It’s important to acknowledge that my own research began by inquiring into the social and political conditions of the 1980s, rather than via a specific artwork or artist. In tandem with colleagues in the European museum confederation L’Internationale, the research focused on the 1980s as a moment of profound change.[12] Across different parts of Europe, from the transition of post-Franco Spain to the ‘final decade of Yugoslavia’, a radical and long-lasting reorientation was taking place with regards to how state and civil society, or governments and their publics, viewed each other.[13] One of the most acute and far-reaching expressions of this was the writing of the new neoliberal doctrine by Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, which culminated in the former’s toxic assertion in 1987 that ‘there’s no such thing as society’.[14] Hall understood early on the importance of these seismic shifts. His landmark essay ‘The Great Moving Right Show’ (1979) made salient observations about the danger of Thatcherism and the push to the right as a response to the political and ideological crisis that had engulfed Britain. Reading it today, as right-wing populism becomes pervasive in the guise of Donald Trump, the Law and Justice Party in Poland, the Five Star Movement in Italy, Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Hungary or the election of Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Hall’s assertion that ‘the strength of [the right’s] intervention lies partly in the radicalism of its commitment to break the mould, not to simply rework the elements of the prevailing philosophies’ seems alarmingly prescient.[15] His reading of the late 1970s and early ’80s through a Gramscian framework that insisted on viewing the ‘conjunctural’ and ‘organic’ in tandem allows us to understand the conditions to which black artists in the 1980s spoke. Their ‘immediate terrain of struggle’ — institutional and cultural exclusion based on the grounds of race — was coupled with a deep, ‘organic’ shift in how the UK government, and the governments of Western democracies at large, understood their role. Hall recognised that in this moment a new ‘historical bloc’ was forming, comprising ‘new political configurations and philosophies’. It is these that we are living with today. The political philosophy that fuels elements of anti-immigrant, small government, nationalist populism that claim to ‘break the mould’ began to lay its roots at the onset of Thatcherism in Britain.

12 See Nick Aikens, Teresa Grandes, Nav Haq, Beatriz Herráez and Nataša Petrešin-Bachlez (eds), *The Long 1980s: Constellations of Art, Politics and Identities. A Collection of Microhistories* (Amsterdam: Valiz and L’Internationale, 2018).

13 See ‘Introduction’, Aikens et al., *The Long 1980s*, p. 9.

14 Margaret Thatcher, interview by Douglas Keay, *Woman’s Own*, 23 September 1987.

15 Stuart Hall, ‘The Great Moving Right Show’, *Marxism Today*, January 1979, p. 16.

Collage and Montage as Modes of Articulation

Hall’s analysis underscores the significance of the political and ideological shifts in the 1980s for *our* present, of how the ideological struggles of that decade are ‘articulated’ to today. When my research turned to the artworks, it became apparent how artists were articulating those shifts, revealing that history was also the means for them to come to terms with their present. By pasting newspaper clippings onto the painted sections of *Toussaint L’Ouverture*, Himid placed two historical moments — the first successful slave uprising at the turn of the nineteenth century and 1980s Britain — in contestation. Himid saw, like many of her contemporaries, the importance of reconfiguring history as a means to give it new traction in the here and now. Similarly, artists and collectives such as Boyce, Black Audio Film Collective, Chila Kumari Burman and Sutapa Biswas, to name just a few, were working through history in their paintings, films and print work as a necessary move to map out and lay the groundwork for their individual and collective projects, as well as to articulate what they were living through as *historical experience*.

It’s equally important to understand the forms of address through which histories were being articulated. Staying with *Toussaint*, the figure evokes theatre set design, the discipline in which Himid was trained. C. L. R. James’s dramatisation of *The Black Jacobins* (1934) titled *Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History* was staged in London in 1936 before being revised in the 1980s under the title *The Black Jacobins* and performed again in London by an all-black cast.[16] Mindful of the need to revisit and reclaim histories (both the Haitian Revolution and James’s brilliant publication), Himid’s work intervenes in the tradition of history painting as well as points to the ever-present, ongoing struggles for black communities in 1980s Britain. The inclusion of collaged contemporaneous newspaper clippings is a call to consider different modes of representations and interrogate how narratives arrive into public consciousness: either on (or absent from) the walls of major museums, through art schools or via the media. Similarly, Black Audio’s seminal film *Handsworth Songs* (1986) shows footage of the 1985 uprisings in Birmingham spliced and layered between tinted archival footage spanning the decline of industry in the north of England with the arrival of the Windrush, the boat that brought a generation of Caribbean migrants

Black Audio Film Collective *Handsworth Songs*

16 In 1934, James wrote *Toussaint L’Ouverture: The Story of the Only Successful Slave Revolt in History*, which was performed in 1936 at London’s Westminster Theatre, with Paul Robeson in the lead role. The play was revised in 1967 under the title *The Black Jacobins*. It has since been performed internationally, including in London at Riverside Studios in 1986 as the first production of Talawa Theatre Company, with an all-black cast, directed by Yvonne Brewster.

to Britain from Jamaica in 1948. Here the crisis of 1985 is viewed through the interlocking lenses of migration and economic decline – the 'ghosts' that haunt the streets of Handsworth. *Toussaint*, which opened three of the four iterations of the exhibitions, and *Handsworth Songs* served to both wake history up and as an invitation to complicate our understanding of how historical narratives are mediated. They 'articulate' the 1980s through a refracted lens of the past. The manner in which that history is articulated, however, is a deeply self-reflexive artistic exercise, where material, linguistic, aesthetic or sonic considerations come to bear on the political implications of history experienced in the present.

Signs of Empire (1984), the slide-tape piece by Black Audio Film Collective accompanied *Toussaint L'Ouverture* in the opening galleries at the Van Abbemuseum and Nottingham Contemporary. First produced while the members of the collective were still students, the work comprises a sequence of slides from colonial archives, overlaid with a series of subtitles serving as linguistic shadows to the images. 'The archive', 'memory', 'its dirty contents' redirect our relationship to the slides from one of passive spectatorship to critical investigation, namely the history of imperialism and its manifestation in European modernity. The reading is further infiltrated by a heavy, oppressive soundtrack: the soaring violins at the top of Richard Wagner's *Ring Cycle* (1848 – 74) opens the piece. A British politician's voice insistently repeating 'they don't know who they are and what they are, and really what you are asking me is how one gives them a sense of belonging', is interspersed with the sinister plucking of piano strings. Through the interplay of image, text and sound, *Signs of Empire* demands that we investigate the colonial archive, its ideology and its implications for contemporary black subjectivity. It demands that we interpolate what we see and hear. As artist and theorist Kodwo Eshun has remarked: 'in its terror and its austerity, it itself manufactured concepts for rethinking European authority far in advance of the academy. It exceeded it by assembling an affective economy that can evoke the psychic consequences of the imperial moment.'[17]

Mercer's 1991 essay 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation' is helpful in reading Black Audio's sophisticated remixing of cultural and political signifiers. The text is a formative analysis of the 'recurrence of collage, montage and bricolage as organising aesthetic principles in black visual arts in Britain' and, as such, is an important reference in understanding

17 Kodwo Eshun, 'Untimely Mediations: Reflections on the Black Audio Film Collective', *Nka: Journal of Contemporary African Art*, no. 19, Summer 2004, p. 40, http://www.essayfilmfestival.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/19.eshun_.pdf, (accessed 27 September 2018).

how these strategies have been interpreted. Mercer sees these as the 'formal and aesthetic strategies of hybridity that critically appropriate and re-articulate given signifying material in producing new representational statements'.[18] Mercer's understanding of montage takes place 'at the level of cultural theory'. His central claim is that by appropriating, remixing and reformulating different signs, black artists were engaged in a discursive, semiotic struggle. Drawing on philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin's 'insights into the multiaccentuality of the sign' Mercer points towards a reading of the aesthetics of diasporic, post- and anti-colonial identity as a re-articulation of existing 'metaphorical vocabularies and available philosophical resources'.[19] Here, the formal assemblage in *Signs of Empire* mines and interrogates European colonial modernity in order to create a filmic and representational language through which to speak. Going further, we could say it is a mode of articulating in both senses of the word, at the level of language and as a linkage, at once a discursive, theoretical proposition and an aesthetic practice.

Black Audio FilmCollective
Signs of Empire

Gavin Jantjes
A South African Colouring Book

Presented adjacent to *Signs of Empire* and *Toussaint L'Ouverture* at the Van Abbemuseum and Nottingham Contemporary, was Gavin Jantjes's 12-part print and collage *A South African Colouring Book* (1974 – 5). The work, analysed by art historian Amna Malik in this volume, is a scathing critique of apartheid South Africa in the form of a mock colouring book. In 'Conceptualising "Black" British Art through the Lens of Exile', Malik draws on Edward Said's use of the musical term the 'contrapuntal'.[20] Said deploys the term to describe the condition of exile – occupying two places, two positions simultaneously. Musically, the contrapuntal involves two or more tunes being played at the same time. Malik describes how Said uses the term to maintain that the 'exiles', with an awareness of two cultures, have a 'plurality of vision', seeing both previous and current contexts simultaneously: 'thus both the new and the old environments, are vivid, actual, occurring together contrapuntally.' Malik writes that Said set out the ways that the contrapuntal awareness of the exile can inform a methodology that allows one 'to make current the views and experiences that are ideologically and culturally closed to one another'.[21] Malik uses this to examine the ways in which Jantjes could mobilise and draw on dif-

18 Kobena Mercer, 'Black Art and the Burden of Representation', in *Welcome to the Jungle: New Positions in Black Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 253.

19 Mercer, 'Black Art', p. 255.

20 Edward Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Out There: Marginalizaition and Contemporary Culture*, eds Russell Ferguson, Martha Gever, Trinh T. Minh-ha and Cornel West (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990), p. 358 quoted in Amna Malik, 'Conceptualising Black British Art through the Lens of Exile', in *Exiles, Diasporas and Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Institute of International Visual Art, 2007), p. 167.

21 Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage: 1994), p. 37 quoted in 'Conceptualising Black British Art', p. 167.

ferent references to intersect with different political concerns. In her analysis, Malik pays particular attention to Jantjes's use of a photograph of a black woman cleaning the streets of Johannesburg. The image, we are told, was appropriated from Ernest Cole's book *House of Bondage* (1968) and is reproduced in *Colouring Book* in a Warholian repetitive grid across the print. Her reading of the image is one that sees it operating 'polyphonically': Warhol's smiling white, blonde Marilyn is replaced by a faceless black worker, scrubbing on all fours. The appropriation of Coles's image through the aesthetics of Pop simultaneously addresses questions of class, gender, race politics and their relationship to the capitalist system. Here, Jantjes articulates – both expresses and brings together – a set of interlinked concerns through the use of a single, repeated image. Furthermore, Malik's reading of the image through the contrapuntal allows for an understanding of the work across multiple registers. Encountered in the exhibition space, the grouping of *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, *Signs of Empire* and *A South African Colouring Book* foregrounded the different ways artists mobilise montage: as a means to announce history in the present, to align different historical and cultural signifiers, and to infiltrate intersecting concerns of class, gender and race. The grouping was also driven by a wish to acknowledge the different ways in which this practice invites readings: as work that gathers and reuses, that operates discursively and contrapuntally. This layered approach to image making appeared throughout the exhibition. It infiltrated the vast terrain of political, theoretical and art historical co-ordinates that artists were working through.

Returning to a single work, however, shows how sophisticated constellations were formed. I use 'constellation' here as Walter Benjamin did, to describe the manner in which historical linearity gives way to component parts taking on meanings in relation to one another. Boyce's sardonically titled *Lay back, keep quiet and think of what made Britain so great* (1986), see the artist's own self-portrait on top of floral wallpaper inspired by designer and socialist thinker William Morris. Blackened English roses, poignant conflations of cultural signifiers, flank three crucifixes that depict caricatures of imperialist propaganda posters from India, Australia and South Africa. In placing her own image in this configuration, Boyce entangles her self-representation with Morris's legacy (his socialist credentials were complicated by his position of moneyed privilege) and the Arts and Crafts Movement more broadly, with British imperialism and national identity. The artist works through her relationship to British heritage in its different aesthetic, political and identarian guises, not as a means to establish a fixed position or lineage between them but to initiate a dialogue across nineteenth-century imperial Britain and the life of a black woman artist in 1980s Britain. This conversation takes place

Sonia Boyce
Lay back, keep quiet and think of what made Britain so great

amidst the flat patterns of Morris's wallpaper design, supporting history's immediate presence.

In the often cited essay 'Beyond the Boundary: The Work of Three Black Women Artists' (1996), Gilane Tawadros connects Himid's notion of 'gathering and reusing' to what she sees as a historiographic approach that interrupts Modernist notions of linear history. This is also applicable in Boyce's *Lay back*. Tawadros argues that by appropriating and bringing together different elements to create something new, a relationship is forged both with the past and the future, 'which stands in stark contrast to the consciousness of time articulated by the modern avant-garde artist'.[22] The thrust of Tawadros's argument is that the sophisticated assemblage of elements – in the case of *Lay back*, the blackened rose, the Morris wallpaper, the self-portrait and colonial history – were not only 'affirming the interdependency of the histories of black people and western civilization but also questioning the precepts of modern historiography, that is the ordering of history in terms of privileged concepts of tradition, evolution, source and origin'.[23] In Tawadros's terms, Boyce's practice can be understood as a historiographic device that articulates different moments, without using one moment to express the other. Rather, her practice sets up a 'complex unity' within the work, where Boyce asks the viewer to consider the relationships and reverberations *between things*. Indeed one of the strengths of *Lay back*, like so many works in the exhibition is that it invites us to do the work of articulating – of linking – what we see.

Articulation: Theory and Practice

The work of these artists and the critical investigations into montage and assemblage, are indicative of the interplay between formal strategies and the political context that inspired them. The larger question of how to interpret and experience politically specific artworks driven by formal and aesthetic strategies, permeates art historical and curatorial critique. It is one that is brought into sharp relief through an analysis of the work of black artists in 1980s Britain, made all the more compelling when viewed in parallel to then discussions on theoretical models through which to analyse race. Theories of articulation developed within the field of cultural studies and in the context of a crisis in Marxist thought following 1968. Their origins can be found in the work of Argentinian polit-

22 Tawadros, 'Beyond the Boundary', p. 241.

23 Tawadros, 'Beyond the Boundary', p. 252.

ical theorist Ernesto Laclau and specifically his 1977 publication *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*. Here, Laclau asks that we question the 'connotative or evocative links' between certain discourses and customs, and think how concepts are linked to concrete situations or realities. For example, he posits that political discourse is not inherently grounded in class struggle. Rather, how different actors link a particular discourse to a specific struggle allows it to gain traction and lend it hegemonic potential. At the core of Laclau's argument is a push away from the reduction of theoretical concepts, particularly those pertaining to classic Marxism, to the extent that they become divorced from both other theoretical concepts and the specificity of actual social relations. He calls instead for an articulation of different theoretical concepts with the concrete.[24] Building on this, Hall in his 1980 essay 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', offers one of the most detailed accounts of his own theoretical position in relation to articulation. Significantly, he does so through an analysis of two positions in relation to then contemporary understandings of race. The first is the 'economic': everything is secondary to ownership and money, meaning, social or cultural relations are extensions of economic relations, a classic Marxist reading Hall considers reductive and ultimately restrictive. The second is 'sociological': race is understood as a complex social formation that cannot be reduced or adequately theorised only in terms of economic relations – traditions, cultural protocols or languages outside of economy evolve differently. Hall suggests that these two understandings respond to each other:

> the former tends to be monocausal in form, the latter tends to be pluralist in emphasis. If the dominant tendency of the first is to attempt to command all differences and specificities within the framework of a simplifying economic logic, then that of the second is to stop short with a set of plural explanations that lack adequate theorisation and which in the end are descriptive rather than analytic.[25]

The problem here is not in deciding which reading must take precedence over the other, but their lack of theoretical connection. Hall suggests this is symptomatic of a larger theoretical problem posed by 1980s leftist thinkers. Such models share parallels with the sociopolitical context/

24 Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism – Fascism – Populism* (London: NLP, 1977), p. 7.

25 Stuart Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', in *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader*, eds Houston A. Baker, Jr, Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1996), p. 18.

aesthetics binary – the former becomes reductive, missing 'that which is proper to art', as Fisher has said, while the latter can lead to shaky descriptions that overlook the specific conditions in which the work was made.[26]

Hall uses two concrete examples to demonstrate how and why these two approaches to the analysis of race are compatible. The first is that of racial division in apartheid South Africa – which cannot be read simply in terms of ethnic difference – but must take into account structural political and economic relations. The second is slavery, complicating the classic Marxist understanding of capitalist production, and leading to a theory of articulation. Hall writes: 'whereas under capitalism the worker owns his own labour power which he sells as a commodity to the capitalist, slaveholders owned both the labour and the slave.' The two modes of production 'the one "capitalist" in the true sense, the other only "formally" ... are combined through an articulating principle'. Hall continues:

> In short, the emergent theory of the 'articulation of different modes of production' begins to deliver certain pertinent theoretical effects for an analysis of racism at the social, political, and ideological levels. It begins to deliver such effects – and this is the crucial point – not by deserting the level of analysis of economic relations (i.e., mode of production) but by posing it in its 'correct, necessarily complex, form'.[27]

What we see with theories of articulation is a model that allows us to take seemingly incommensurable approaches and link them together through the specificity of that which is being analysed. Articulation is not a random bringing together of different, disparate elements but is dependent on a structured relation. This is summed up in Louis Althusser's phrase that appears repeatedly in texts on articulation theory and is used in the title of Hall's essay: 'a complex unity structured in dominance.' Equally, we should remember that the unity Hall describes is not that of an identity, for example, where the different elements of the linkage are defined or reproduced, or as he puts it 'expresses' the other. Rather, the unity is always necessarily 'a structure in which things are related, as much through their differences as through their similarities'.[28]

26 Fisher, 'The Work Between Us', p. 21.

27 Hall, 'Structured in Dominance', p. 35.

28 Hall, 'Structured in Dominance', p. 38.

Althusser's notion of 'structured in dominance' echoes across the paintings, videos, photographs and installations that were included in *The Place Is Here*. It is inscribed into the handwriting of Donald Rodney's *The House that Jack Built* (1987) where he laments 'Jack's house' [being] built on 75 million black souls'. It is present in Chila Kumari Burman's *Convenience Not Love* (1986 – 7) where Thatcher appears as John Bull, the stout personification of Britain, uttering the infamous lines of her 1978 'Swamped' speech.[29] It unfolds in the layered readings of *Handsworth Songs* and the conditions of migration and post-industrial economic depression that ignited the uprisings of 1985. It is there in Jantjes's appropriation of Cole's image of a black woman on all fours on the streets of Johannesburg Zoom out and it is there too in the exhibition as a whole: a group of artists operating within the 'complex unity' of Britain in the 1980s – Thatcherism, a white, Western-centric art history and as British-diasporic subjects: 'a complex unity structured in dominance.'

Donald Rodney
The House that Jack Built

Chila Kumari Burman
Convenience Not Love

Exhibition as Articulation

Cultural theorist Jennifer Slack defines three levels on which articulation takes place: the 'epistemological, political and strategic':

> Epistemologically, articulation is a way of thinking the structure of what we know as a play of correspondences… politically articulation is a way foregrounding the structures and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination, strategically articulation provides a mechanism for shaping interventions within a particular social formation, conjuncture or context.[30]

As many authors in this volume note, artistic output in the 1980s took place concurrently with organising exhibitions, conferences, writing, publishing and political activism, much of which was played back in the works themselves. As evidenced in one exhibition archive section curated by

29 On 27 January 1978 Margaret Thatcher gave an interview on Granada Television. Asked about the new 'get tough' Tory immigration policy by interviewer Gordon Burns, she replied: 'people are really rather afraid that this country might be rather swamped by people with a different culture and, you know, the British character has done so much for democracy, for law and done so much throughout the world that if there is any fear that it might be swamped people are going to react and be rather hostile to those coming in. See https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/103485, (accessed 12 October 2018).

30 Jennifer Slack, 'Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, eds David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 112 – 27.

the Blk Art Group Research Project, the Blk Art Group organised conventions and multiple exhibitions while producing individual work. Between 1981 and 1984, by then renamed the Pan-Afrikan Connection, they organised seven exhibitions, two conventions, held regular meetings in the West Midlands. As Keith Piper described in 1983, it was a 'co-ordinating apparatus' intent on organising a 'full programme' of seminars, debates and workshops alongside their core activity as artists.[31] Sections of the Making Histories Visible archival presentation showed a series of three key shows in London, organised by Himid between 1985 and 1986. These featured diverse work by black women artists in order to ensure work was shown, and to counter a creeping tendency for the discourse around so-called black art to be male-dominated.[32] Documents relating to film workshops in the June Givanni Pan African Cinema Archive presentation, show how the ACTT (Association of Cinematograph, Television and Allied Technicians, the principle broadcast union in the 1980s) Workshop Declaration provided funding for artists to research and develop work. Black Audio, Sankofa, Ceddo and ReTake, who all benefitted from the ACTT declaration, gave practical workshops on shooting and editing film, in tandem with their prolific output of videos for the TV, festival and gallery contexts. The production, communication and dissemination of their work was fundamental, not ancillary, to their practice. These elements are linked to the discursive, historical and political operations in the works themselves – or as Laclau would posit, the ideological position of the works is connected to the concrete conditions. Moreover, the archiving of these processes by the artists, curators and writers involved was, in the absence of institutional support, a necessary strategy to safeguard the knowledge being generated.

The productive links between the different epistemological, political and strategic work of the Blk Art Group, Himid and the film workshops are elements of a practice of articulation informing and strengthening one another. Different iterations of *The Place Is Here* operate on the grounds Slack lays out. Despite, as Deborah Cherry points out in her essay in this volume, the many recent research and exhibition projects examining the 1980s that have taken place in Britain, this group of artists still occupies, at best, a peripheral space in art history and public consciousness. As a white student of art history in Britain myself, how is it that these artists were not known to me until well after my graduate studies? Many 1980s artists have spoken of teachers' blank faces staring back at them when

31 See Blk Art Group Scrapbook 1979 – 84, http://www.blkartgroup.info/blkartephemera.html, (accessed 21 September 2018).

32 The three shows organised by Himid all took place in London. They were: *Five Black Women*, Africa Centre Gallery, 1983; *Black Women Time Now*, Battersea Arts Centre, 1983 – 4; and *The Thin Black Line*, Institute for Contemporary Arts, 1985

they asked for historical examples of black artists. Such exclusion and amnesia remained in art history departments into the early 2000s. *The Place Is Here* attempted to acknowledge and start to fill this blind spot. The configuration looked to 'foreground the structures and play of power that entail in relations of dominance and subordination' in the 1980s,[33] traversing intersecting lines of racism, sexual politics and institutional exclusion present too in the works: the racist newspaper cuttings that mark so many, the text and image on panels, canvases and screens speaking clearly and loudly back to power. Here, Eddie Chambers's now iconic *Destruction of the National Front* (1979 – 80) is a striking example. His 'swastika-d' Union Jack disintegrates across four panels as an emphatic address to decouple and banish the twin forces of neo-fascism and nationalism pervasive in Britain the year Thatcher became prime minister.[34]

By revisiting this work today, one strategy was to ask: where are we now with some of the questions these artists posed in the 1980s? As late critic and theorist Mark Fisher warned, 'it's important to resist the simple story that things have "progressed" in any simple linear fashion since *Handsworth Songs*' and the 1980s more broadly. In light of the recent Windrush scandal shaming the current British government, Fisher's words ring painfully true. Perhaps the larger question is: how can we read this history and what do we take from it? For my own part, I approached this set of practices from a generational and racial distance – I am a white man born in 1981. In this sense, working on the exhibition I was constantly confronted with the question of how to be in dialogue with a history in which I didn't take part and which did not constitute any part of my education, but that was urgent to address. How, I attempted to ask with the exhibition, can a space be created for new readings, new relationships across histories and generations to emerge? Here, *The Place Is Here* took its cue from the practice itself. Just as artists were 'gathering and reusing' different elements across timeframes and discourses, the format strove to create different interpretative possibilities, rather than impose a fixed narrative. A decision was taken early on not to structure the work chronologically or demarcate any beginning and end to the decade. The historical edges of the 1980s were frequently crossed with works from the 1970s and 1990s included. Indeed, the naming of the so-called Black Art Movement or the 1980s was absent from the title, to try and alleviate the burden these labels bring to bear, while allowing the historical specificity of the practice to leak into the here and now.

33 Slack, 'Theories and Methods', p. 112.

34 1979 saw the far-right party the National Front field their largest number of candidates in national elections.

Similarly, the use of archival material was not intended as an illustration or contextual background to the reading of the works, but as different entry points to the practice, as linking mechanisms that aimed to create a complex unity across artworks and the conditions within which that work took place. Lines of interrogation that may at first seem to be working in different directions were aimed to offer what Mercer described in relation to black cinema as a 'dialogic' rather than 'monologic' approach.[35] At Nottingham Contemporary, for example, *Militant Women* (1982) by Chila Kumari Burman, including representations of Eritrean women were placed on a wall adjacent to David A. Bailey's *Family Album* (1987), Said Adrus's *Zeitgeist* (1982 – 3) and next to a screening room showing Sankofa's *Territories* (1984). These were very different interrogations of forms of representation, the documentary image and gendered, racialised and queer subjectivities. Yet, just as Mercer saw the strength of black cinema in the 1980s as the 'adoption of the collusion of cultures and histories that constitute our very conditions of existence', the configuration of works and archives in different rooms was intended to open up, rather than close down, our understanding of the works and the historical conjuncture out of which they arose.[36] 'Articulation', cultural theorist Lawrence Grossberg wrote, 'links this practice to that effect, this text to that meaning, this meaning to that reality, this experience to those politics'.[37] It operated like the strategy of montage taking place in many of the works themselves: the bringing together of different fragments invites readings that, as Hall writes in relation to montage can only take place 'without the solace of closure', which in turn exposes the production of meaning as an 'arbitrary act'.[38] Such an approach was amplified by the opportunity to reconfigure the exhibition in different variations across four venues. Artworks and archives entered into different dialogues with one another creating different interpretative possibilities with each encounter. In this sense, the space of each exhibition was conceived as a moment of arbitrary closure', where relationships and theories are temporarily fixed before being untangled, reconfigured and re-articulated.[39]

David A. Bailey
Family Album

Said Adrus
Zeitgeist

A Complex Unity

The call to black students that was hung in universities and polytechnics across Britain stated that the 1982 First National Convention of Black

35 Mercer, 'Diaspora Culture and the Black Imagination', in *Welcome to the Jungle*, p. 62.

36 Mercer, 'Diaspora Culture and the Black Imagination', in *Welcome to the Jungle*, p. 63.

37 Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 54.

38 Hall, 'On Postmodernism', p. 137.

39 Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies', in *Cultural Studies*, eds Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 280.

Art, organised by the Blk Art Group, would discuss the 'form, future and function of black art'. Many of the artists who would play a defining role in the conversations that ensued were present at Wolverhampton. Araeen, a generation older than the students in the room, gave the keynote lecture titled 'Art and Black Consciousness'. As those who attended the conference attest, the exchanges were pointed and urgent: what constituted 'Black Art'? What, in fact, was the thrust of the political and cultural project that these artists wanted to undertake and who had the right to speak for whom? These questions have continued to reverberate since 1982. They hovered, determinedly unanswered, in the galleries of *The Place Is Here*. The different aesthetic trajectories and political concerns of artists who attended Wolverhampton, and those in the exhibition at large, reveal that although the divergent tracks they pursued often intersected and informed one another, they were inquiries with their own, self-prescribed impetus. Chambers's and Keith Piper's outspoken appeal to Pan-Africanism, Claudette Johnson's painterly celebrations of the black female body or Black Audio's development of a black filmic language, to name just a few of those at Wolverhampton, were first and foremost singular aesthetic and political projects.

What does it mean, then to articulate the 1980s via *this* group of black artists? In closing I would suggest that collectively the work, the modes of practice and intellectual-political concerns within the different iterations of the exhibition represent 'a complex unity' wherein the many positions reveal a structure in which 'things are related, as much through their difference as through their similarities'.[40] The relationships across theory, practice and political positions interweave and interlock organically, in a Gramscian sense, that defies strict demarcation or division. Rather, they are joined by a structural relation that arises from the historical conditions of 1980s Thatcherite Britain and that precipitated a chorus of images, ideas, sounds and textures that continue to speak across their pasts and our present.

40 Hall, 'Structured in Dominance', p. 35.

PARSE: On the Question of Exhibiton

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From	*PARSE* Journal, Issue 13 'On the Question of Exhibition'
Publisher	HDK Valand, University of Gothenburg
Editors	Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson
Year	2021

A DESIGN FOR AN AQUARIUM MOUNTED IN HANDSOME RUSTIC-WORK.

Issue 13
— Spring 2021

On the Question of Exhibition Part 1

The question of exhibition delineates an act of showing. On the surface, the term “exhibition” manifests in itself the very same operation of clear and distinct presentation that it designates. The question of exhibition as a transparent construct appears both in the discourse of the everyday and in specialist jargon of academia and the art field. The question “What is an exhibition?” – seems to offer no real problem. “Exhibition” is simply where things are shown and where people go/come to see those things that are on display.

This issue of PARSE, published in three parts, examines the question of the exhibition. One of the aims of this series-issue is to turn attention to the material, experiential, as well as conceptual and political conditions of the exhibition that may have been overlooked within the growing literature on curatorial and exhibition histories. Our aim, as editors is not to elevate the exhibition form. Rather, we wish to interrogate exhibition as a pervasive category of display and mediation where principles of exposition, demonstration, exemplification, taxonomy, circulation, commentary, spectatorship and valorization are operative. Since the 1990’s curatorial discourse has sought to position the curatorial away from, or at the very least as in excess of, the practical tasks of exhibition-making whilst the burgeoning field of exhibition histories has created a historiographic approach to the forms, developments and questions posed by exhibition. This series of contributions seeks, in some respects to return to the fundamental question of exhibition-to interrogate it as a self-explanatory category. Part 1 published in June 2021 includes contributions from Dave Beech, Kathrin Böhm, Alaina Claire Feldman, Samia Henni, Steven Henry Madoff, Saul Marcadent, Lisa Rosendahl and Jéssica Varrichio; and roundtables with Rasha Salti, Nick Aikens, Kristine Khouri and Anthony Gardner; and with Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, Gavin Wade, Mick Wilson and Franciska Zólyom.

Part 2 will be published in late Summer 2021, followed by Part 3 early Autumn 2021.

Parts 2 and 3 will include contributions from Ingrid Cogne, Patrizia Costantin, Kris Dittel & Jelena Novak, Cătălin Gheorghe, Ola Hassanain, Jeanne van Heeswijk, Maria Hlavajova & Damon Reaves, Catalina Imizcoz, David Morris, Barbara Neves Alves, Paul O'Neill, Joey Orr, Mateusz Sapija, Vladislav Shapovalov, Sasha Shestakova and Joshua Simon.

Five research frames have guided the selection of contributions. Firstly, as editors we were keen to mine the competing ontological and epistemological conceptions of exhibition as manifest in contemporary exhibition practices, exhibition studies and exhibition histories. Secondly, we have sought to consider the exhibition as research action, research object and research site across the arts and sciences; that offers a distinct form and affordance in both manifesting and furthering an inquiry. Thirdly, we were keen to identify the translations and relays of exhibition within online and algorithmic domains, both before, during and (eventually) after the Covid19 pandemic. Fourthly, the interchanges between exhibition and what has been variously termed socially engaged, socially embedded and expanded practices was of particular interest for us, considering practices that are often, if not typically, constituted and valorized in terms other than that of the exhibition. Lastly, and to some extent framing all of these questions was the manner in which political imaginaries are at work within different constructions and operations of exhibition.

In approaching these five questions many of the contributions draw on specific cases studies of exhibitions, spanning the fields of art, architecture and fashion and drawing from a vast archive of contexts and histories. Running through these contributions is

an invitation to question the terms under which we accept "exhibition" as given. Our ambition is not to chart an exhaustive map of exhibition typologies or sketch a history of the manifold ways in which exhibition as form has been deployed. Instead what we hope emerges, is a prompt to reconsider the terms and implications which the exhibition – in its manifold forms-evokes.

In the opening contribution Dave Beech offers a historical contextualization of the exhibition. In seeking to redefine the exhibition Beech asserts for the need *"to elevate art as a scholarly activity above both handicraft and industry."* His contribution foregrounds the historical institutional conditions that have created certain forms of exhibition practice but offers a challenge to the way in which technologies of display require broader differentiations between the ubiquity of *"shop window displays, media events, public information announcements, pedagogical situations, activist events and other forms of display."*

Samia Henni posits exhibition as a form of writing. Drawing on her long-term research on the architecture of the French war in Algeria, presented in both exhibition form and a book, Henni alludes to the ways in which the exhibition produces forms of writing that are not possible within a publication. *"Conversely"* she writes, *"the form of writing that the various iterations of the exhibition have produced in the exhibition spaces cannot be expressed and transmitted through the writing of this text."* In the case of this issue, gathering largely textual contributions on 'the question of exhibition' is perhaps counter intuitive. Writing essays on exhibitions is, as Henni summarises 'not the exhibition itself'. This statement, like many similar propositions in this issue, is not intended to mark a space of exception for the category of exhibition. Rather, it is to point to how manifesting, processing and rehearsing research material through the configurations of the visual, textual

and spatial conditions of an exhibition produces meaning and affect in particular ways.

In the conversation between between Rasha Salti, Nick Aikens, Kristine Khouri and Anthony Gardner two exhibitions – "Past Disquiet" and "NIRIN" are the framework for a series of reflections on exhibition forms, its relation to research and the object of research. This triangulated connection in "Past Disquiet" is explored through an examination of the social history in the Arab world in which readers are invited to consider process as opposed to artworks in an exhibition. By insisting on research as the exhibition form, the curators *"try to tell "complete" stories, or at least to have the least amount of gaps possible. In other words, they were compelled by a sense of duty, and they were compulsive by nature."* The conversation style of this contribution enacts the interview methods deployed by the curators in which texts and video materials served to provide a more comprehensive narrative perspective: *"the full story."*

Turning to "NIRIN", the 22nd Biennale in Sydney, art historian Anthony Gardner foregrounds his approach not as *"thinking about exhibitions, or with exhibitions but thinking through exhibitions"*. In NIRIN, Gardner suggests, artistic director Brook Andrew sought to *"strip away the discourse so that the matter just speaks for itself, or speaks in a way that it wants to speak. It is simply the presentation of the thing. It could be something that has a more spiritual resonance, it could be something that has different resonant materialities."* In a critical intervention, the curators reflect on the role of spectators' imagination to resolve their engagement with the histories presented and the strategic elisions in these exhibitions.

Saul Marcadent uses the case study of the silver anniversary of *Self Service*, to focus on the relation between editorial practices in the printed magazine and in museum exhibition-making. The description of the exhibition approach, its display strategies and the role of the editor and curator Marcadent invites a reconsideration of the exhibition as an expansion of the fashion magazine form *"in which the contributions of photographers, designers and stylists coexisted, in much the same way as they do on the page";* were shown *"as exhibition-document that through the selection of a number of fragments reconstructed a history of publishing, thereby underlining the need to preserve its traces."*

Alaina Claire Feldman provides a comprehensive historical overview of practices of exhibiting nature and its role in advancing the disconnect between nature and the construction of self. This particular focus on the history of the aquarium provides an important account of how personal interest – the aquarium as hobby – was inextricably connected to bourgeois life. *"Possession of the aquarium and acts of maintaining an entire microcosm reflects greater colonial projects of control, because it allows for the Western bourgeois hobbyist to extract and sustain exotic life."* Her argument develops towards connecting the evolution of the aquarium as a private pursuit to a public presence, inseparable from the history of colonialism.

Jéssica Varrichio narrates her experiences of a site-specific curatorial project *museu do louvre pau-brazyl*, in São Paulo, Brazil. This descriptive account of the making of the exhibition and the censorship of artwork *Black Semiotics* by the artist duo Tetine reveals how civil and political structures continue to regulate the representation of certain histories: *"Our aim was to recover the traces, to make them visible, to give importance to what has been left behind in the footnotes of history, and to be attentive to what lies underneath supposedly neutral images and discourses. And beneath that siren are the traces of suffocated women."*

To want to reveal the names, stories and experiences of women killed under a dictatorship in the artwork resulted in the literal covering of the work with maritime symbols.

Lisa Rosendahl's contribution to this issue comprises a remarkable reflection on practice in media res, as she considers her curatorial process leading up to the 2021 edition of the Göteborg Biennial of Contemporary Art, titled "The Ghost Ship and the Sea Change" and that in takes as its point of departure the underrepresentation of Sweden's colonial past and its contemporary consequences. Rosendahl's approach hovers around the double meaning of thew word plot in English: *"Poised in the middle between the idea of a 'site' and the idea of a 'narrative', a plot is a sequence of events as well as a spatial designation. If a 'theme' is an overriding message, determined already at the outset of a story, a 'plot' is rather how that message is played out over time through actions and events."* Characterising the biennial form as situated and polyvocal, Rosendahl considers the ways in which it contributes to the diversification of historical narration in public exhibition, against the backdrop of what some have described as a 'historiographical turn' in museological and other modes of public art exhibition.

In the review by Kathrin Böhm of the role of exhibition within her expanded art practice, and in the accompanying conversation between Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, Gavin Wade and Franciska Zólyom moderated by Mick Wilson, there is a consideration of how exhibiting as a field of operations may operate in two quite different registers. On the one hand, there is a discussion of exhibiting strategies that foreground usership rather than spectatorship, premising operations other than those of thematic display and representation. These modes of exhibition still utilize the terms of showing and display, however they also mobilise other economies that seem to exceed the prototypical circulation of

the gaze and distribution of viewership within the exhibition of art as such. On the other hand, the focus of the discussion turns to a projected exhibitionary strategy of public review and the artist's intention to use an exhibitionary process to review the arc of her practice to date. This proposition of exhibition as compost pile and exhibiting as composting, proposes that the terms of the practice are re-evaluated and transposed beyond the terms of "yet another project." Composting as curator Gavin Wade begins the discussion, is an invitation to consider *"the idea of place, connecting it to the social space in which things come together. The compost heap needs to accumulate in one place. It needs time. It needs to create its own ecology. It needs worms. It needs layers."*

Steven Henry Madoff proposes a reconsideration of the idea of the friend, as a proposition of difference rather than sameness. This revised understanding of friendship is connected to an approach towards understanding political imaginaries of exhibition. He writes: *"Friendness offers a thinking about exhibitions as sites of unsameness that can include sameness, that afford the accommodation of handedness within the unevenness of the world."* Curators, Maddoff puts forward, create networks of connections that produce new political relations — in what he posits as forms of proximity where sameness and difference are operative. It is a desire for an intimacy within a renewed politics of exhibition and exhibiting.

This is the second instalment of the three-part series-issue of PARSE: 'On the question of exhibition'. This part seeks to further develop the multi-stranded examination of exhibition materialities, discursivities, processes and politics. The following contributions extend the considerations initiated in Part 1, by bridging the world-making and ordering techniques of exhibition – what we might broadly call its *onto-epistemological* register – with the pragmatic and technical questions of exhibitionary apparatuses, or its *operational* register. The purpose being not to create a dichotomy but rather to set up a field of tension and interference between different moments of production-analysis. This part offers detailed analyses of individual exhibitions, allowing for an interplay between the specificities of singular instances coupled with a wider angle from which to survey the field. Part 2 contains contributions from Ingrid Cogne Patrizia Costantin, Kris Dittel & Jelena Novak, Catalina Imizcoz, Joey Orr, Barbara Neves Alves, Mateusz Sapija, Vladislav Shapovalov, Sasha Shestakova, and Joshua Simon.

Within and across these two registers, key themes of exhibition as research site and the incorporation of modes of practice not singularly oriented to the gallery exhibition, are further elaborated. Rather than a monovocal question demanded of a monolithic object, in attending to the material assembled here we move across a distributed network of situated enquiries that will resonate in different ways depending where one is coming to the material from, and on where one pauses to listen. Contingency is perhaps the relay that allows a provisional pluriversality, a thinking-together that avoids the universalising gesture of a single discourse which seeks to explain everything once and for all.

Part 2 begins with Catalina Imizcoz's critical appraisal of the exhibitionary form and its modern genealogy, testing the potentials within experimental modes of exhibiting. It provides sites

of knowing otherwise, what she terms “epistemological otherness.” It considers two instances – Cecilia Szalkowicz’s *“Soy un disfraz de tigre”* and Adrián Villar Rojas’s The Theater of Disappearance – where exhibition architectures are enacted through explicit choreographies of human and more-than-human bodies to articulate a claim for the exhibitionary that does not reduce the form to a unitary principal of transparency.

Similarly thinking through matters of format and the material-discursive constellations of display, artist and researcher Ingrid Cogne, who works across the fields of choreography, dramaturgy and visual arts, continues the consideration of the exhibition as a locus of knowing. Again, the material-spatial instantiations of specific bodies, in specific places, in all their particularity are foregrounded as a means to claim a specificity for the kinds of knowledge work possible in exhibition. Importantly, this is proposed as a matter of exhibition as knowledge practice in its own right, and not of a knowledge transmitted from elsewhere ‘via’ the mediating instrument of exhibition, nor of a knowledge ‘about’ exhibition reduced to the terms of modern *transparency* and self-evidence.

Barbara Neves Alves takes as her point of focus the two Portuguese colonial exhibitions of the Salazar regime (in 1934 and 1940) that staged a fantasy of empire within the historical horizon of the great twentieth century waves of decolonization. Neves Alves employs the figure of the spectral to work through the relays of empire and coloniality within contemporary imaginaries. The visual and material processes of production-analysis are centrally operative in this thinking through of the juridical-cum-exhibitionary pronouncements of “empire” at the “end of empire”.

Russia’s dual position within the global relations of coloniality including state colonialism directed toward Indigenous people

living in the Circumpolar North creates, for Sasha Shestakova, different colonial temporalities. They examine this by looking at three display-artefacts (an amphibious plane, a bronze sculpture, and a carved tus) in the Museum of Arctic and Antarctic, in St. Petersburg. Emphasizing the need to avoid reducing coloniality to a solely “cognitive model” disconnected from the past and present of colonial oppression and decolonial resistance, Shestakova produces a way of thinking the complex temporaralities of settler colonialism through a critical, situated deconstructive reading of exhibitionary protocols. In seeking a path to decolonize the museum they insist on recognizing the temporal ordering and authority over indigeneity exercised by the museum apparatus while also insisting on the enduring capacity for resistance that produces other modes of *duration*.

Mateusz Sapija extends the discussion of the interchanges between socio-politically engaged practices and the exhibition, a theme that has been one of the red threads carried forward from Part 1 of the series-issue. He provides a case study of the 2005 exhibition *[S]election.pl* at the Centre of Contemporary Art, Warsaw, conceived by Paweł Althamer and Artur Żmijewski as a site for enacting radical democracy.

Patrizia Costantin examines the operationalising of Glissant’s archipelagic and Barad’s refractive figures of thinking in her mapping of curatorial and exhibitionary research practices from the last decade in the Finnish context. Constantin continues another of the red-threads of discussion, namely the focus on the exhibition as a locus of enquiry and knowledge work. Her text also seeks to enact the methodologies of coproduction described in her account of these various cases that include “Contemporary Art Archipelago” (2011) and “Frontiers in Retreat” (2013 – 18).

Vladislav Shapovalov's contribution is in the form of a visual essay based upon his 2017 film *Image Diplomacy*, part of a long-term project (2015 – ongoing) focused on the exhibition as political medium in the 20th century. The essay combines images from scenes shot in the archives of the former Italy-USSR friendship society, Association Italy Russia, in Milan, and at the Film Archive in Bologna, with images from scenes shot inside the reconstruction of *The Family of Man* exhibition, at Clervaux Castle, Luxembourg. The work is an important extension of the studies on cold war era cultural politics and the central role of exhibition and touring shows in contesting international relations and in competing formations of transnational solidarity.

Joey Orr provides a fascinating account of British artist Jeremy Deller's 2009 It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq and its moot afterlife within the permanent collections of three US museums. He notes that what began as a matter of simply trying to locate a cotton banner (one of the central material agents within a complex constellation of events that comprise the work and its first moments display in the USA) expanded into a still unfolding consideration of how researching and caring for the object in question extended the work's social operation and gave further impetus to its specific modus operandi as an engine of dialogue. The inclusion of the work in the museum then appears not as a form of cultural incarceration and the reification of a social operation but rather, as Orr proposes, as keeping in play key aspects of social practice fundamental to the work's inception and realisation. The work's operations exceed its exhibitionary phase precisely through its afterlife within museological operations of care.

In recent years there have been a number of exhibitions that have sought to address the im/materiality and instabilities of the voice and voicing, including the remarkable and ambitious (2012 – 2013) *Acts of Voicing: On the Poetics and Politics of the Voice* at the

Württembergischer Kunstverein Stuttgart and its accompanying bilingual volume acting as both critical anthology and exhibition catalogue. Kris Dittel & Jelena Novak provide a case study of this phenomenon in their account of the recent experimental exhibition Post-Opera (TENT, V2_Lab for the Unstable Media, Operadagen Rotterdam, 2019). With respect to the operations of exhibition as such, the complex issues already at work in the spatial distribution and in the differentiation (yet co-constitution) of the subject/body/voice provide an exciting context to consider how exhibition stages the auditor-viewer. Dittel and Novak walk us through the exhibitionary staging in a compelling and thought-provoking manner.

Finally, in concluding Part 2, Joshua Simon returns us to the question of world – making and the onto – epistemological register of exhibition with which we opened. In his provocative contribution "The Exhibition as Cosmogram" Simon notes that a cosmology depicts how a certain civilisation perceives the universe, and that a cosmogram provides a diagramatic illustration of that universe. He then moves to the bold assertion that the contemporary art exhibition operates as such a cosmogram. Taking the reader through a cascade of "generative terms, operations and gestures" he outlines a relation between the modus operandi of contemporary global capitalism and the contemporary art exhibition as form. At this point returning to Steven Henry Madoff's "Exhibition of Friends" in part 1 of the issue-series provides some generative red threads. Both Simon and Madoff contributions are dynamically synthetic with sources; inventive, speculative, and *adisciplinary* in their effects; whilst being pleasantly and unabashedly immodest in their range. While stylistically very different, the two texts provide us with forms of writing-thinking that might be seen to manifest a specifically curatorial mode that is pointed to in many of the approaches to – and reflections on – exhibition, which readers will encounter across the issue.

Over three issues of PARSE 28 contributions have approached "the question of exhibition" from myriad positions and contexts. The contributions have moved between close readings of exhibitionary projects, analysis of the historical and political conditions of exhibition, to more abstracted reflections on the very notion of making public. Introducing the third and final part of this series, it is tempting to reach for conclusions – or at the very least an "answer" to the "question" of exhibition. Looking back over the three issues, however, it feels important to treat the different registers, lenses and forms through which the "question of exhibition" has been approached as the necessary prompt to refuse a totalizing summary – to acknowledge that it is precisely in asking the question of exhibition, rather than offering a single answer, that its productive, generative, often contradictory potential resides.

The restless questioning of exhibition underpins Part 3, where artists curators and researchers unpick exhibition's entangled relationship to pedagogy, to institutional processes, to aesthetics, to constituent work, to lived experience and the ways in which the *political* arises out of these entanglements. The issue includes texts by Doreen Mende, David Morris and Grace Samboh, Ola Hassanain, Li Yizhuo, Ginevra Ludovici, Cătălin Gheorghe, Sabine Dahl Nielsen, a visual essay by Paul O'Neill and a roundtable with Jeanne van Heeswijk, Maria Hlavajova, Damon Reaves & Mick Wilson.

In the introduction of Part 2 we identified as a certain push and pull between what we described as the "onto-epistemological" register of exhibition and its "operational" character – a tension between the exhibition's capacity, or promise of world-making and the material, structural and linguistic instruments that determine exhibitionary practice. This seems a useful step in attending to the different ways we might approach, if not exactly define exhibition

and, in a sense look beyond the study of exhibition as it has been structured either through a different polarity between the epistemological claims of curatorial discourse or and the detailed analyses of singular case studies that comprise exhibition histories. There is a need to consider the question of exhibition in a way that draws from — but is not constrained by — both approaches. Extending this, and with the current set of contributions firmly in mind, it seems important to consider the question, limits and what may be termed the "violence" of representation, as the force that attracts and repels these two registers: The constant wrestling with representation, and the (im)possibility to move beyond its horizon, haunts exhibition. Within part 3, exhibition's relationship with representation is brought to the fore. The contributions point to the ways in which the persistent troubling of representation within exhibition produces an (in)ability to project futures, to attend to the messiness of the everyday, to transmit the nuances and divergent modes of community and collectivity; to scale up; to enact, rather than illustrate inquiry and educational process.

Opening the issue is Doreen Mende's self-described part essay, part diary "Endlessly from the middle, or, Towards curatorial/politics." For Mende the question of representation and how we might "look beyond it" — drawing upon the work of Denise Ferreira da Silva — frames her situated reflection on the exhibition and her arrival at "curatorial/politics." Proposing "in-hibition" as an alternative to the ontological violence that defines ex-hibiting, Mende invites us to "re-own, re-create, de/recompose the means of making public by rehearsing the practices of disengaging with cultures of domination."

Ola Hassanain takes on the prospect of rethinking inside/outside from the perspective of architecture and the built environment. While Mende approaches the curatorial as necessarily "starting

from the middle," Hassanain shares a similar wariness with respect to the dichotomy of inside/outside. "Dichotomies," she writes are the epistemological dilemma of spatial training." Drawing on the theoretical framework of the *Black Outdoors* and in particular a conversation by Fred Moten and Saidiya Hartman, Hassanain invites us to think of forms of architecture, and in turn exhibiting that go beyond questions of function and ownership.

Extending the propositional nature of exhibition is Cătălin Gheorghe's "Farewell to Research. Welcome to Rescription." Originally delivered as a lecture during the 9th Bucharest Biennale curatorial workshop "Handfuls thrown into air and scattered over earth" in June 2020, this playful, provocative and complex text refuses to let the history of exhibition and its institutional formation determine its potential for the future. Gheorghe invites us to consider it as a potential medium for an "insurgent message." Responding to the question of how the exhibition may be differently approached as apparatus, genre and poetic, and with particular attention to the claims of research practices, he proposes a number of strategic possibilities of "rescription" and the ways in which the exhibition might operate as "xeno-spaces" that will act as (rather than represent) experiential, political and sensorial spaces.

Shifting register and tone, though no less propositional, is an extended roundtable with artist Jeanne van Heeswijk and Maria Hlavajova, Damon Reaves and Mick Wilson. By revisiting two large scale exhibition projects "Philladelphia Assembled" and "Trainings for the Not-Yet" readers are invited into a considered recounting of exhibition processes and what van Heeswijk describes as the "protocols of engagement" that determine the ways in which she enters into conversation with communities and institutions. For van Heeswijk the proposition of exhibition, and across the constituents

she works with, lies in its ability to "perform and assemble" within an institutional setting, whereby objects and their arrival in institutional contexts become conduits for a restaging of community, a series of props and instruments to prepare for a world to come.

David Morris and Grace Samboh's essay invites us to consider the exhibition as festival. Through a retracing of the BINAL Experimental Arts '92, staged in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, Morris and Samboh imagine forms of exhibition and making public that are not constrained by the representational formats and norms that have defined certain (Euro and US centric) understandings of exhibition. "What," they ask, "if we were to imagine an exhibition format deriving from the internal logic of the work (...)?" This seemingly simple question, unfolds as a fundamental challenge to the logics of exhibiting, its modes of representation and the eventhood of biennial culture.

Sabine Dahl Nielsen's "Njangi House: SAVVY CONTEMPORARY and the Postmigrant Condition" approaches exhibition through institutional modes of operation. Looking to the different facets of the Berlin based SAVVY, including its organizational and programmatic constitution, Dahl draws parallels with the "postmigrant society." In this reading, SAVVY's refusal to represent migrant communities (and commitment rather to engage the "postmigrant condition" through a cross-institutional approach) collapses the divide between programming exhibiting and organizational structures, or Hassanain's dichotomy of inside/outside.

Ginevra Ludovici offers a concise recounting of the so-called "educational turn" in curating. Ludovici employs a series of recent cases studies to indicate the ways in which curatorial and institutional practice took on pedagogical devices and structures following the Bologna Accords, and the critique of this so-called

"educational turn." The three cases – "Metabolic Museum-University (MM-U)" (2019); "The Tree School" (established 2014); and "The Knowledge Market: Speculative Collective" (2019) – took place across different institutional and exhibitionary formats and contexts but offer fascinating examples of the stakes, limitations and possibilities of forms of exhibition as school or counter-pedagogical practice. Concluding Ludovici's examination of these three projects there is a certain caution expressed at the ways in which education and pedagogy can be both instrumentalised and represented within exhibition formats in formulaic and co-opted ways.

Returning to the relationship between research and exhibition practices approached in parts one and two of the issue series, Li Yizhuo looks to two exhibitions at RedCat in Beijing. The essay draws on curator Chen Shuyu's proposition of "curatorial spatiality" and the historiography of experimental Chinese art from the 1980s. Within this issue's constellation of contributions, Li's analysis points to the ways in which space is used as a method within exhibition practice to draw out relationships with both ideas and practices. Architectural and scenographic devices become ways of instantiating, rather than representing research, where references to exhibition histories for example are not merely documentary but appear spatially and materially.

Closing the third part of our issue On the Question of Exhibition, is a visual essay by Paul O'Neill. Drawing from the curator's archive of thousands of images from his exhibition making practice, and focusing on one arc of this practice from 2003 – 2016 – from the cumulative exhibition series "Coalesce" to the "We Are the Center for Curatorial Studies" and "WE ARE THE (EPI)CENTRE" – the image sequence proposes ways of thinking the exhibition as a nexus of relation and exhibition-making as sustained and cumula-

tive practice, in ways that exceed the established terms of analysis of "the white cube," say. Mixing images drawn from different stages within the exhibition-making process, the push and pull between the onto-epistemological register of exhibition making and its "operational" register re-emerge, precisely through a move away from representational tactics in favour of formal, spatial, and material evocations, calling up propositions put forward by Li. The image sequence is not a formal documentation as such, nor a re-creation of exhibition through online simulacrum, but rather a visual thinking through moments of an exhibition-making practice.

We, as editors, would like to thank all the contributors to the three parts of "On the Question of Exhibition," as well as the many colleagues who have peer-reviewed contributions and offered valuable input to the shaping of the issues. We are delighted that the work begun in this issue will continue with the forthcoming volume *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, co-edited by Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson, part of the series "Vector – critical research in context," published by VECTOR, "George Enescu" National University of the Arts in Iasi, in partnership with PARSE Journal, University of Gothenburg. In the longer term, we are also delighted that the launch of Part 3 of this Issue of PARSE also marks the beginning of our partnership with Afterall Books: Exhibition Histories, allowing a sustained dialogue across two research and publishing platforms with the hope of extending the inquiries begun in "On the Question of Exhibition."

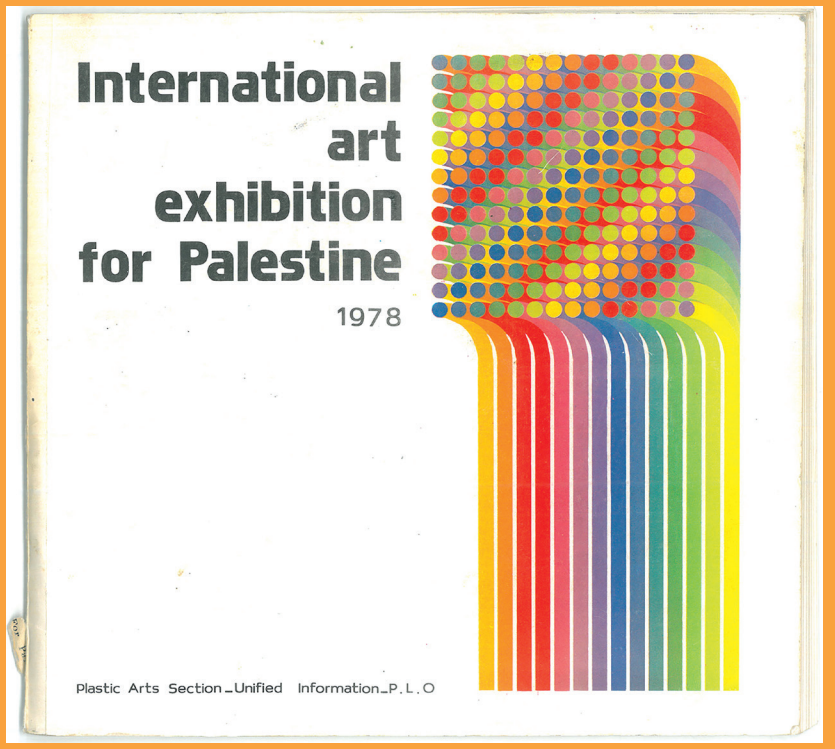
On 'Past Disquiet' and 'NIRIN'

Authors	Rasha Salti, Nick Aikens, Kristine Khouri and Anthony Gardner
From	*PARSE* Journal, Issue 13 'On the Question of Exhibition'
Publisher	HDK Valand, University of Gothenburg
Editors	Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson
Year	2021

Nick Aikens (NA): The focus of this conversation is two exhibitions – “Past Disquiet” and “NIRIN”. “Past Disquiet” was a ten-year research project that evolved into different exhibition iterations. “NIRIN” was the title of the 22nd Sydney Biennale, which was much more of an event with a shorter research period and responding to the conditions of the biennial. I would like to talk about the exhibitions themselves, and specifically the relationship between the form of the exhibition, the research and the object of study. I am less interested in discussing what these exhibitions were “about”, but rather in thinking through what the form of the exhibition afforded: its relationship to processes of research, to the thing that was being studied, and how different political imaginaries were transmitted or evoked in the space of the exhibition. Within curatorial discourse, curators – myself included – are very good at talking about what exhibitions are “about”, as well as institutional contexts of exhibitions. But I sense there is less vocabulary to talk about specific strategies, tools, affordances of the exhibition itself. I hope by looking closely at these exhibitions we can start to get at some of these tools or strategies. Rasha and Kristine, I was wondering if you could just take us into “Past Disquiet”, to where the research project started and its gradual evolution.

Kristine Khouri (KK): In a way “Past Disquiet” started before we found the catalogue. It came out of an interest that Rasha and I shared in the social history of modern art in the Arab world. One prism through which to understand that history was through exhibitions. The project “Past Disquiet” started when we found the catalogue for the “International Art Exhibition for Palestine” in the library of a gallery named Agial in Beirut, in 2008 or so. We started looking through it and were pretty astounded by what we saw. It was an exhibition organised in 1978 in Beirut at the Beirut Arab University by the Palestine Liberation Organisation’s Department of

Plastic Arts under the Unified Information Office. There were 200 artists from almost 30 countries who participated in this exhibition. So the breadth of the show was vast for the time, for this city, for the country, and amidst the context of a civil war. This catalogue was our guide – we were looking at the names of the artists who participated and the people who contributed to making the exhibition possible. We were not interested in the fate of the artworks in the exhibition, but trying to understand how it came to be.



English Cover of bi-lingual catalogue for the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, Beirut, 1978. Plastic Arts Section, Palestine Liberation Organisation.

There were two lines of inquiry that guided us and that subsequently framed our exhibition. One was that this exhibition, which was a solidarity exhibition, was meant to be a seed collection

for a future museum for Palestine. What we found out was that there were other similar projects like this around the world. And secondly, we wanted to understand who these artists were and why they had participated. What networks of artists and solidarity existed behind those names? We started interviewing people in Beirut, Damascus, Jordan. An encounter with an artist, Claude Lazar, in Paris opened up the idea that the museum in exile or solidarity collection, was partly inspired by the International Resistance Museum for Salvador Allende. Interactions with other artists showed that there were two other collections or museum collections in solidarity with other political causes that had similar formats. One called the *Art against Apartheid* collection, and one that comprised two exhibitions in support of the people of Nicaragua. The research went into a number of directions and eventually, starting in 2015, we transformed this research into a documentary and archival exhibition at Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) in Barcelona. It included facsimiles of documents of photographs, with videos containing narratives that told the stories of these different exhibitions, of the collectives and events that took place tangentially related to these different projects. We toured that exhibition to different cities and we also published an edited volume.

Rasha Salti (RS): If I were to describe the phases of the research, the first few years we were “Palestine centred”, so to speak. The most cumbersome obstacle to contend with was that the fate of the artworks was mired in controversy. If the artworks had been destroyed or stored somewhere, the research would have been a lot easier. The controversy cast a shadow over our research. We had to explain that we were not on a mission to recover or reclaim the artworks, parse through the “fog” of rumour, quell rancour and reassure different protagonists that the story of the exhibition was exclusively our interest. In other words, the story of the 1978 international exhibition was an unscarred or open wound

and our motivations were not immediately understandable. Until we met with Bartomeu Marí, and had a concrete end goal to transform the research into an exhibition, we were not sure what the research was going to lead to – whether it was going to produce an article or a book. Given that the catalogue was our prime forensic source, we could conduct our research in myriad ways, by investigating primarily the list of artists. For instance, given the fact that we were working from Beirut, and that there were only four Lebanese artists listed as having donated artworks, the obvious question was “why only four?” Was it that the organisers disregarded Lebanese artists or that the artists refused to donate artworks? The question of the “absent” names was one way to pursue the research. At some point we abandoned that approach. There was a practical question that occupied us for some time, namely identifying the artists whose names had been transcribed into English phonetically, or whose names were simply misspelled. The Algerians, Moroccans, Iraqis and other Arab artists we recognised, but some of the European and Japanese artists were very difficult to track down. At some point, we shifted the angle of our approach, and decided to focus on why the largest number of artists donating artworks hailed chiefly from France, then Italy, Poland, Japan, Iraq and Morocco. This angle drew out a potent framework that made visible the networks linking the artists. The catalog contained another interesting list, namely those acknowledged and thanked for having made the exhibition possible. It was peculiar, and in a sense unique: there was Jacques Dupin, who was a poet and worked with the Maeght Gallery; Max Clarak-Sérou, one of the most influential curators and writers in the surrealist movement in France; and the Iraqi Ministry of Culture and Arts. Predictably, our first step was to conduct Internet searches and map who was who, and who was still alive. The research was intimately connected to the exhibition, because with the prospect of “presenting” the research, “filling gaps” (so to speak) or answering blanks became a priority between 2015 and 2018.

Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978’, installation view, Museu d’Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA), 2015. Photo: La Fotogràfica

NA: Could you say a bit more on how the invitation to present the research in exhibition form affected the research?

RS: We felt we owed it to our interlocutors to try to tell “complete” stories, or at least to have the least amount of gaps possible. In other words, we were compelled by a sense of duty, and we are compulsive by nature. For instance, we could have opted to accept that the Nicaraguan chapter was simply beyond our reach (and means). In the first two iterations of the exhibition, at MACBA and at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt (HKW), that chapter is minimal. Audiences or visitors were not pressing us to deliver more. We felt the pressure or compulsion to push the research. Moreover, given that our exhibition did not include artworks, the “usual” budget line associated with costs of shipping and insurance were redirected (to some extent) towards funding research. The exhibition’s edition at HKW was “enriched” with research pertaining to the GDR. And we were only able to conduct research in Nicaragua

after the Museo de la Solidaridad Salvador Allende (MSSA) in Chile committed to producing a new edition. They marshalled resources, but also mobilised a network to enable research there.

NA: When you presented the exhibition at the “Transmitting, Documenting, Narrating” seminar in October, there were a few things that really struck me about some of the decisions that you made. For example, the use of the catalogue and the posters.

RS: We were aware that the PLO waged the battle for political representation by mobilising artists to produce a visual representation of the reality of Palestine, its struggle and people – the reality and the significance, allegorical, symbolic, that speaks to political emancipatory imaginaries. The PLO was structured a little bit like a government in exile, the Office (or department) of Unified Information was effectively the equivalent of a Ministry of Information, and usually these don’t have a “Plastic Arts Section”. For instance, if you examine the legacy of posters commissioned by the Office of Unified Information, the polyphony of voices, the incredible breadth of styles, of approaches, is breathtaking. Furthermore, the PLO militants and intellectuals presented Palestine as a metaphor for the world’s injustice, and therefore the Palestinian struggle was a realm of projection and connection, and the posters incarnated that. This is one element to keep in mind.

The other is about the historical contexts that preceded these exhibitions that we were researching. The movement of non-aligned countries was losing steam and the Cold War was still ongoing. The Soviets had devised the programme of “solidarity” or “friendship” with the socalled Third World, i.e. Asia, Latin America and Africa, as the basis for cultural diplomacy in their contest for hegemony. That is how the PLO were able to operate in the former Eastern bloc for instance. In this context, the question is how come so many art-

ists from Western Europe were involved. This explains why so many of the Italian artists involved in the exhibitions were either card-carrying members of the communist party or very close to those circles, or that the French were close to the extreme left. The 1970s was also the decade when the communist parties in France and Italy were losing popularity and share of the vote. So we broached these histories from the question of the Palestinian struggle. We came into contact with chapters in the history of artistic practices at a moment when artists felt that art belonged in the street, in public space, when murals were considered remarkable political artistic interventions, and when political exiles were not “refugees”. Our awareness of the shift in perception (in thinking historically) was sharpened as we were thinking through the exhibition. In 2015 we used posters in the videos as “documents” and iconic incarnations of how struggles were projected into imaginaries, but by 2018 we treated them as signposts of a political history of struggles, as more formal documents. You can also trace how our relationship to documents changed, and we felt the necessity to introduce a hierarchy.

Exhibition view, Past Disquiet, Sursock Museum, Beirut, 27 July – 1 October 2018.
Photo: Christopher Baaklini

AG: It’s fascinating to think about the constant transformations of the exhibition – especially what you just said about entering the universe through Palestine – I think it’s a beautiful way of framing the various situations of “Past Disquiet” and what “NIRIN” as a first-nations project was trying to do, and what exhibition histories, curatorial histories – or however we want to frame what we’re talking about – what they might do and what their manifold starting points might be.

RS: Approaching these histories from the perspective of the Palestinian struggle was incarnate or made manifest in the fact that the catalogue for the “International Art Exhibition for Palestine” was always placed prominently at a central location within every iteration of “Past Disquiet”. We did not reproduce it, we filmed our hands leafing through it and that video was playing on a monitor that “hovered” at a higher or high level in a central and prominent position. To acknowledge that we were dealing with a history with a lot of gaps, and to make sure that we didn’t have a self-assured curatorial upper hand. It was very important for us that we did not resort to any of the techniques of making an exhibition look neat, of “masking” the exhibition tools; for instance, all the wires of the monitors were visible, as well as those used to hang screens and panels. And we experimented with how to reproduce documents in different formats and media. At MACBA, we reproduced documents on long thin banners made from fabric that was thick enough not to undulate, to create the impression of a “forest” of documents. At HKW we reproduced them on very thin boards, like placards. At MSSA in Santiago we made metal rectangular frames that stood on the floor in which we presented reproductions of posters on two sides. And we also used thin shelves that were stuck on the wall at a low level on which we placed reprinted documents. And in the last edition of the exhibition in Beirut, we used shelves and metal frames with cork boards on which we pinned documents.

Past Disquiet. Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978, 19.3. – 9.5.2016, Installation view © Laura Fiorio/Haus der Kulturen der Welt

NA: And interviews were an important part of the exhibition display as well?

KK: The main components of the exhibition were texts, wall texts – that were more expansive than maybe traditional wall texts – facsimiles of documents and other materials and the videos. The videos were central to the exhibition; they were the sites where the stories were properly told – if you just read the wall texts, you wouldn’t get the full story. The videos most often contained interviews with people, with artists who participated in any of those exhibitions, PLO representatives – such as Abdallah Hijazi – speaking about the commissioning of posters in Poland and having artists travel to Tunis from Poland. Or a Japanese historian, Itagaki Yuzo, about Japanese solidarity for Palestine. We did upwards of seventy interviews for this project. We were relying on people’s memories and on these interviews because in the case of the Palestinian exhibition there is no

cultural archive to go to, there is no single place with all those “truthful” documents that may tell that story, and the making of the exhibitions. So we relied on people to tell their story of what they remembered of the exhibition and their practice overall. The other element that was important in editing these videos was that our voices were present – we were mediators who acknowledged our own presence and responsibility in doing this research and narrating these stories. There is no claim that this is an objective history – that this is the story that we are telling – we acknowledge that there are gaps and that memory is complex.

Exhibition view, Past Disquiet, Sursock Museum, Beirut, 27 July – 1 October 2018. Photo: Christopher Baaklini

NA: It also assembles the different actors around this project from 1978 to the early 1990s within the space of the exhibition in a way that can’t be done in any other form. That’s a very powerful and apt way to transpose the politics of solidarity that was at the heart of this project into a formal, spatial, visual resolution.

KK: Yes, it’s a substitute for bringing them all physically into one place, which is impossible. I think Rasha often refers to the exhibition as an exhibition of stories, and it is as if you are walking into a website in a way: you get to choose your own path and one of the things that was very important to us was to not just have one voice in one place, but to start realising that there were links and connections in the same way that images appeared multiple times within the exhibition.

Exhibition view, Past Disquiet, Sursock Museum, Beirut, 27 July – 1 October 2018.
Photo: Christopher Baaklini

NA: I want to touch on the decision not to include the artworks. You have talked before about not wanting to fetishise the object, but it also does something very specific to the exhibition. We’re looking at an exhibition in which the artworks aren’t there, they are ghosts – to use your phrase – and the exhibition itself becomes much more about the relationships between the different actors, your relationships with the history, with the material. Was it really early on that you decided that the artworks themselves wouldn’t play a part in the exhibition?

RS: It was. In the framework of “Past Disquiet”, the artworks would have been regarded as documents, as forensic evidence. We found a few in Beirut, they were in a private home, placed there by the 1978 exhibition’s custodian in 1982 for safekeeping. A couple were actually torn from shells that had exploded in that apartment during the war. When I visited the house and saw them, it was a very emotional moment, but I was more moved by the back of the painting, seeing the label marking the 1978 exhibition, than by the painting itself. Conceptually, showing the label would have been more meaningful. At MSSA, there were artworks in the museum’s storage facility, and during the exhibition of “Past Disquiet” on the first floor of the museum, there was another one on the ground floor that showed artworks from the 1972 solidarity with Chile collection. In fact, it was the first ever iteration of an art collection in solidarity. In “Past Disquiet”, we only see a single artwork as a “ghostly” projection, and it was made by a Palestinian artist, Abdul Hay Mossalam, as an homage to the Plastic Arts Section, after the PLO left Beirut and the Office of Unified Information was destroyed in 1982. That painting had the key to the office of the Plastic Arts Section encrusted in it. We projected its image on the wall, flickering between its face and back, to create the effect of an “apparition” and reduce its presence as a forensic document.

NA: If we turn now to “NIRIN”. Anthony you are talking about this exhibition from a very different position – as an art historian and an interlocutor with Brook Andrew, the exhibition’s curator. It’s worth considering the differences that distance affords when thinking about the exhibition. But maybe to get us into the space of “NIRIN” could you introduce the project?

AG: The way that I’m exploring this kind of vocabulary, is to be thinking *through* exhibitions – not thinking about exhibitions, or with exhibitions but thinking through exhibitions. Not as a curator

of those exhibitions, but as somebody who is interested in the history and ongoing persistences of those exhibitions. Thinking through exhibitions is a way of thinking of the exhibition, the curatorial history, sometimes long after the exhibition itself has come down, or indeed before it has even been put up. So “NIRIN” was the title of 22nd Biennale in Sydney. The Biennale started in 1973 in part to help inaugurate the Sydney Opera House, and this was the 22nd edition. It was initially scheduled to take place from mid March to 8 June 2020, but because of the Covid-19 pandemic in Australia it closed on 24 March and reopened in early June for some venues and mid June for others, and was extended to September 2020 for some venues and October 2020 for others. As well as having iterations online and satellite presentations of a set of artworks, particularly moving image artworks, in other locations including Naarm/Melbourne, later in 2020. It included 98 artists and groups, 8 main venues, initially 7, but the National Art School was closed because of the pandemic and the works that were in that space were shipped to another venue called Carriageworks.

So Brook Andrew, the artistic director of the Biennale, is an artist of Wiradjuri background. He was the first Indigenous artist to be the artistic director of the Sydney Biennale, which was a very significant aspect to what Brook was trying to do. He called the exhibition “NIRIN”, which is the Wiradjuri word for edge, Wiradjuri being the country of his mother’s heritage. A lot of what Brook is exploring, both in his artistic and curatorial research, has been to look at the kinds of language, vocabularies and ways in which culture might operate to disrupt the kind of international art English that has transpired within the contemporary art world, especially biennales. Brook has been an influential artist in and from Australia since the 1990s. I came to the exhibition as an interlocutor with Brook as well as just an audience member with a vested interest in

a sense, thinking about what “NIRIN” was trying to do when Brook was emphatic about it being focused on artists, First Nations and queer-led. Like you Nick, I’m less interested in what exhibitions represent so much as I’m keen to explore curatorial passages or episodes within exhibitions. To think about what it is that an exhibition does, and perhaps what curatorship does.

Left: Musa N Nxumalo, Moonchild Sanelly – Anthology of Youth, 2016. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020) at Art Gallery of New South Wales. Presented at the 22nd Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from the Sherman Foundation. Courtesy the artist and SMAC Gallery, Cape Town/Johannesburg/Stellenbosch.
Right: Kunmanara Mumu Mike Williams, Tuppy Ngintja Goodwin, Sammy Dodd and the artists of Mimili Maku Arts, Kulilaya munu nintiriwa (Listen and learn), 2020. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Art Gallery of New South Wales. Commissioned by the Biennale of Sydney with generous assistance from Australia Council for the Arts and Fondation Opale. Courtesy Mimili Maku Arts. Photograph courtesy of Anthony Gardner and the Biennale of Sydney

NA: To speak about one of those episodes in the exhibition, could you talk about “Powerful Objects” in “NIRIN”?

AG: In some respects, I think “NIRIN” is the reverse of some aspects of “Past Disquiet”. In “Past Disquiet”, instead of showing the artwork,

Rasha and Kristine engaged with the discourse, histories and apparatuses around the art works. Brook was almost doing the opposite of that with a series of presentations or modes of display that he called “powerful objects”. These were a series of artefacts, artworks and archives that were presented at different moments in the exhibition, with little contextualising information or other curatorial accoutrements to distract from how the objects resonated in and of themselves. On the one hand it is a typical artistic device to present something as a readymade, not necessarily having to take a stance in relation to that which is being presented. But at the same time, what happens with these objects when you strip away the discourse and the matter just speaks for itself, or speaks in a way that it wants to speak? It is simply the presentation of the thing. It could be something that has a more spiritual resonance, it could be something that has different resonant materialities, it could be an AIDS quilt or it could be a dendroglyph design from Wiradjuri country or archives relating to the 1989 exhibition “Magiciens de la Terre”.

Bernhard Lüthi Archive, 1953 – 2014. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Art Gallery of New South Wales. Courtesy Fondation Opale, Lens. Photograph courtesy of Anthony Gardner and the Biennale of Sydney.

To focus briefly on one vitrine, which included material from Bernard Lüthi’s archive: Lüthi was involved in curating a section of “Magiciens de la Terre” focusing on Indigenous Australian artists, and he was co-curator of the lesser known 1993 exhibition “Aratjara” that started in Düsseldorf in Germany. In the vitrine, Brook included the image from “Magiciens…”, of the well-known presentation of the sand paintings of members of the Yuendumu community and Richard Long’s *Red Earth Circle* behind it. Alongside these were Bernard Lüthi’s personal archives from the exhibition. Included on the left side of the vitrine were some clippings, faxes from curators to artists and writers and others, but also some of the dirt and sand from the work in “Magiciens…”. There was also a blueprint with drawings and designs on them, photographic contact sheets and so forth, material that wouldn’t necessarily have been presented in 1989 or 1993. I’m interested in that sense of layering of work and material. Firstly, what does it mean for these two exhibitions to be presented as part of “NIRIN”? One very well known, one lesser known, but very important in terms of thinking about the international, global presentation of Indigenous Australian material, particularly to European audiences. Why did these particular exhibitions become a powerful object embedded within the 22nd Biennale in Sydney, given its context of being artist-led and First-Nations-led? And why was the material sometimes very legible to an audience member, and sometimes not at all, with material layered on top of each other so that a lot of the archival material was present but hidden? In speaking with Brook, he was talking a lot about how both “Magiciens…” and “Aratjara” were thinking about Indigenous artwork presented within large-scale international oriented exhibitions. And while “Magiciens…” became this kind of “cornerstone” of a global exhibition of art, there was a lot of Indigenous pushback against it, particularly in Australia. A lot of elders and artists were resisting the flattening out of material – the comparison with Richard Long

that becomes a spectacularisation and simplification of engaging with land, being on land and being in land. The assumption of Indigenous material below the desacralised Richard Long and the framing of all practitioners as magicians in the first place was deeply troublesome for some Indigenous critics.

Bernhard Lüthi Archive, 1953 – 2014. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Art Gallery of New South Wales. Courtesy Fondation Opale, Lens. Photograph courtesy of Anthony Gardner and the Biennale of Sydney.

“Aratjara”, on the other hand was very much an Indigenous-led exhibition through the work of Djon Mundine, Gary Foley and others. It gave agency to artists and curators from Indigenous communities, in accordance with this material, and subject to protocols in terms of what can be made public. So “Aratjara” is a far more significant exhibition than “Magiciens...” for thinking about First Nations-led exhibition presentations. But what I find interesting is knowing how expansive and bizarre this archive is. It is not often you have sand in the archive, these remnants of a work, and here it is presented as part of an archive, along with these curiously pristine faxes, lacking all those signs of age or

fingernail marks we usually find with faxes, or the discolouration that comes from the faxes’ life. The material condition of the archive connects quite nicely with “Past Disquiet”, especially in terms of the element of time. You can’t think of these exhibitions, their archives, their residues and their reiterations without thinking about what the material ramifications are for those histories, including how those material ramifications kind of erode, block, challenge, represent and demand a rearticulation or reimagining of what those materials might be.

NA: That relates very much to Rasha and Kristine’s decision in “Past Disquiet” to not show images of certain works, but instead show a blank screen.

AG: Yes, it insists on having a kind of imaginative engagement with these histories. I’m reminded of Saidiya Hartman’s approach to what she calls ‘critical fabulations’ and how she insists on injecting imagination or curiosity into the ways histories are presented, how they’re thought through and thought with, which I think is a really interesting pedagogical device. Sometimes what is often missing, particularly with the overabundance of google as an archive and wikipedia as a source of knowledge, is curiosity itself; of going through the unexpected loopholes and wormholes and dead ends, and the tricks that might come from that as a way of thinking and learning. In this respect “NIRIN” was continually thinking about itself and its constituents but also its histories, the sense of curiosity and imagination and reimagining, precisely through what might be missing and what might not be available to know.

RS: Listening to Anthony, I would like to point to another significant point, namely, the desire to restitute and restore. Our research involved often interviewing men and women who were written out of the canon, who were wounded, whose stories were not deemed

worthy of recording, and we were researching museums and collections that did not matter to art historians. In other words, we were conducting a form of restitution and restoration.

Installation view of “powerful objects”: Younosuke Natori, Grosses Japan, 1937; James Gillray, Praetor-urbanus: Inauguration of the Coptic mayor of Cairo, preceded by the procureur de la commune, 1847 (published); Maker unknown, Leg Manacles, c. 1772 – 1868; Anna Borghesi (designed by) produced by Working Title Australia, Helmet, part of armour, part of film costume, worn by Heath Ledger as Ned Kelly in the film ‘Ned Kelly’, 2002. Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020), Campbelltown Arts Centre. Courtesy private collection, Melbourne; and the Museum of Applied Arts & Sciences, Sydney. Photograph courtesy of Anthony Gardner and the Biennale of Sydney.

AG: It is not just a restitution of objects or even of bringing these marginalised or forgotten exhibitions or histories back — it is about a restitution of conversation, dialogue, anecdote, affect, emotion, those things that slide away or leak away from the archive as documents, as things that can’t somehow be captured but which are essential to history, to knowledge and to modes of surviving. What is interesting here is that which can’t be captured, but can still be engaged, experienced, presented, sensed — these sometimes very spiritualised or ineffable aspects that are a kind of a

constant of a lot of exhibitions and yet are very rarely brought into the ways that certainly historians and writers and editors might be thinking about when making that exhibition, precisely because they can’t be easily photographed.

NA: I would like to ask you about another of the “powerful object” presentations Anthony, that included the shackles and helmet.

AG: Sure. So what we’re focusing on is a cabinet presented at the Campbelltown Art Centre, in which a set of shackles was presented alongside a helmet that looks like it could have been worn by a nineteenth-century bandit or bushranger, but was actually from a film set of the film *Ned Kelly* (2006). Next to it was a late-nineteenth-century drawing, a pretty horrific colonial cartoon with a racist depiction of people of colour and the settler controller, and finally a document with a personal handwritten dedication from Hitler about eugenics. What was presented here was not the fact these shackles exist, it is what remains unspoken. What does it mean to have this simulacrum of a helmet that connects to a particular myth of Australia’s development as a nation in the nineteenth through to the twentieth century? But also: what has been historically precluded from those myths of nation — the enslavement of Indigenous peoples, the cultural and physical genocide of those peoples that are known but rarely articulated, and that are part of that mythic history through their absence? Here they were made present again — not just presented in an earnest way, but actually framed within a challenging set of objects, including a simulacrum. The tin helmet resonated with a history of the nineteenth century but actually it was a prop from a film from 2006. And at the same time Australia’s history is quite different from the Nazi genocides of the 1930s, and yet here the shackles were presented alongside a colonial cartoon and a dedication about eugenics from Hitler to a friend of his. The personalisation that

emerges through and despite what might otherwise be captured is exactly what Brook was trying to think about with the notion of “powerful objects”. Is it designed to speak to audience members? Is it designed to be photographed or catalogued for posterity? Or can powerful entities speak to each other through their own conversation, in their own dialogue without the need for archives or audiences or other kinds of intervention that speak for them rather than with them?

NA: I remember you were saying that there was little text given for these powerful objects. Brook opted not to get into a kind of semantic, categorical dance with how these things fit within or outside institutional histories. Rather he presented them as objects, as material things in the present, rather than as categorised, historicised objects that are over.

AG: Exactly, they are in the present and still have a lot to say to the past, the present and the future through their silent witnessing. Different temporalities met within the space and we came to recognise that actually these entities, these powerful objects, have been restituted to the present rather than just relegated to the past. Because the history of genocide is fundamental to the ways we are thinking about the present.

It is an interesting comparison with what Fred Wilson did in “Mining the Museum” and the cabinet titled *Metal Works, 1793 – 1880*, which included the presentation of the shackles that had incarcerated slaves in the United States. The comparison between “NIRIN” and “Mining the Museum” is there on a formal level as well as on a material level. But what was equally striking with Brook’s presentation was what was different from Wilson’s. Brook was thinking through not just the presence of these materials from the nineteenth, twentieth or twenty-first century, but those other exhibition

episodes that would be recognised by quite a number of people that might be seeing this display – or thinking about the museological vocabularies and tropes of display more broadly, and their own colonial heritages. There was a continuation of the urgencies that Wilson presented, but also substantial differences between 2020 and 1992 – 93, and the relationships between the Indigenous incarcerations and the slave trade. Both, however, were fundamentally exploring the twin sides of modernity and coloniality. And again, the quite disparate dialogues within the vitrine in Campbelltown compared with those in Baltimore, which was more overt and direct, whereas in Campbelltown the objects were from quite disparate contexts and a wide expanse of time, from the nineteenth century through the 1930s right up to 2006. I wonder what they might bring to a conversation that Brook could be having with Wilson, or that an audience member of “NIRIN” might be having with an imaginable audience member of “Mining the Museum”.

NA: I wonder how we might consider the different research frames of the two exhibitions and the relationship to the forms of display that they used. “Past Disquiet” began with a single book, and a single exhibition. From here it expanded, but there was a very clear starting point, a very clear object of study if you like. “NIRIN”’s “edges” were porous from its beginnings. There is a way in which Brook invited us to consider different relationships – political, art historical, institutional – within the space of the exhibition. Whereas with “Past Disquiet” the strategy was very different.

RS: “NIRIN” happened within an institution, the curator was fully aware of what he was doing by placing these objects and this archive in a vitrine in that institution. Basically, the institution cannot write its history in the same way after this biennial. “Past Disquiet” on the other hand was an itinerant exhibition, Kristine and I don’t carry affiliations to an institution, we were

always guests. In decentring the canon, it was less an address to a colonial imaginary, more to the modern day imaginary of emancipation. Listening to Anthony and the notion of the “powerful object”, I was thinking that perhaps the resonance between “Past Disquiet” and “NIRIN” is that thread or motif around the migration of images. In militant artist practices, the painting is neither precious nor sacrosant; it is reproduced as a book cover, a poster, a postcard or a calendar. The painting that is the cornerstone of the art market, of the object that the artist produces and is supposed to be unique, this desacralisation (profanation), the free circulation of images is a circulation of political imaginaries, of iconographies. So in the same way that these objects were presented in the vitrine to inspire or provoke evocations, shift the gaze and awaken buried histories, the migration of images did something similar or resonant.

KK: I see a relation in the way we chose not to show the artworks. It asked people to figure out what those works are and see them on the cover of books, see that they are posters, they are calendars. We also didn’t afford the opportunity to spend too much time with the works in the same way that we are not afforded the opportunity to truly access those works today.

AG: And also the agency of objects or entities to persist in different ways. I’m also thinking about infrastructures, because what you were saying is absolutely right; the Biennale in Sydney is itself an institution. What came out of Brook’s insistence on being artist- and First Nations-led has been a radical rethinking of the construction of the Biennale in terms of board members. Now there has to be Indigenous representation on the board, and with “NIRIN” the Biennale found that it needed Indigenous curators, Indigenous curatorial assistants, Indigenous researchers, as an ongoing and sustainable institution for the future.

Installation view for the 22nd Biennale of Sydney (2020) at Museum of Contemporary Art Australia. Photograph courtesy of Anthony Gardner and the Biennale of Sydney.

KK: Maybe we can add the word repair to narratives, in addition to restitution. I think the reparative work in thinking about the canon, in thinking about these histories that challenge museographic practice, or are part of that history, because they are not alternative, they have not quite yet been written into the history of art.

NA: In a recent seminar I took part in, curator Elvira Dyangani Ose talked beautifully about exhibition-making as an instituting gesture. Thinking about the original impulse for “Past Disquiet” as this kind of seed collection, thinking about what Brook was doing in terms of his relationship to those collections and the institutions at the Sydney Biennial, thinking about how “Past Disquiet” assembled these different alliances in history, it seems that in very different ways, there is a form of instituting that happened through the exhibition.

AG: It’s a really interesting one in terms of those three key terms of emancipation, instituting and repair. Can you have emancipation

without repair? Because to repair might actually suture precisely the means through which emancipation might be possible. I haven’t quite worked out what those relationships are, but I think that it’s very pressing that exhibitions, including the next Berlin Biennial, will be thinking through these matters. These questions of presentness, pastness and futurity, through emancipation, instituting and repair. But in terms of what Elvira said, is this instituting gesture in the work of exhibitions alone? This is where you can talk about curatorial work separately, perhaps; maybe the exhibition is doing something different as a set of events that makes palpable, gives presence to that which is behind the scenes? The exhibition, then, gives a form, however precarious, however temporary, to not just the possibility but an actuality of institutional change that has taken much longer and required dialogue and trust to develop behind the scenes through curatorial negotiation and research – rather than just the selection of artworks and their installation in a show. Which of course brings us back to the impulse behind the original exhibition in Beirut in the 1970s and the urge to project a solidarity museum through a single exhibition – and in some sense for Rasha and Kristine to enter this history through Palestine as it were.

RS: The solidarity museum was “invented” in Chile, with Mario Pedrosa, José Balmes and the whole cohort around Salvador Allende. They carried the idea with them after their displacement to Europe and elsewhere in Latin America. However, because of the continuous dispossession of Palestinians we were driven subconsciously towards threading that history from the entry point or perspective of Palestine. In undertaking the international exhibition and the “museum of solidarity with Palestine”, the Palestinians became agents of their own destiny. I never ever lose sight of that generation’s mindset, what it meant for them, who that first generation of refugee and militant men and women were. They were

around seven, eight, or nine-year-old children when they became refugees, so most of them grew up in refugee camps. These children, growing up in camps, totally dispossessed, believed they could build a museum of international art fifteen years later. They rebelled against their dispossession as well as their representation in the international media, and they rebelled against their parents, their immediate kin, who took the handouts and sought through the institutional means afforded to them (via NGOs) to get out of poverty. Instead they chose a risky, dangerous and dramatic path. First they started a student union, then they found ways to establish offices of representation worldwide – they understood the rules of the game – and found ways to stake a presence in the public sphere and mobilise solidarity around their cause.

A walk-through of the exhibition ‘MONOCULTURE – A Recent History’ at M HKA (Antwerp)

Authors	Nick Aikens and Nav Haq
From	*Monoculture*
Publisher	L’Internationale Online
Editor	Corina Opera
Year	2021

Nick Aikens, co-organiser of the two-day conference “Considering Monoculture” in conversation with Nav Haq, curator of the exhibition MONOCULTURE – A Recent History.

Nick Aikens: Where did the idea come from to stage an exhibition on monoculture, and how did you begin your research?

Soviet Corn Campaign Poster, За велику кукурудзу! (For Great Corn!), 1962. Published by Міністерство культури УРСР (Ministry of Culture of The Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic). Image: M HKA

Nav Haq: Exploring the notion of ‘monoculture’ was related to thinking about the stagnation of the ‘multiculturalism’ debate. Like my conceptualisation of the Gothenburg Biennial in 2017 on the subject of secularity, which opens on to questions of ethics and cohabitation, the idea of monoculture is a way to talk about many interconnected things at the same time – from agriculture and linguistics to ideology and officially sanctioned conceptions of culture. Monoculture gives a name to what Chantal Mouffe repeatedly referred to as the ‘forces of homogeneity’ at the ‘Considering Monoculture’ conference. In a societal sense, monoculture means cultural homogeneity, and it felt urgent to address and raise awareness of something that is increasingly prevalent.

Nobody, to my knowledge, had made a map of monocultures, so I had to sort of invent one. The first step was a complex mapping exercise, looking at different understandings and manifestations of monoculturality. It was hands on, with massive sheets of paper, which

A walk-through of the exhibition ‘MONOCULTURE – A Recent History’ at M HKA (Antwerp)

I filled in with artists, ideologies, ideas and practices, as well as all kinds of case studies – then it just kept growing. It was particularly relevant to chart the relationship of art to ideology – so Socialist Realist art in the context of the Soviet Union, to give one example, running into the Corn Campaign, which proliferated monocultural farming in that region. I spent a year or so developing this map, before translating it into an exhibition.

NA: How did you form this? Were there specific books that informed you, specific historical narratives of the twentieth century? Nationalist Socialism, eugenics, *Négritude* immediately come to mind…

NH: It felt important early on to approach monoculture from a philosophical perspective, rather than a purely epistemological one. I am more broadly interested in bringing more philosophical dimensions to the projects we undertake at the M HKA. There also seemed to be a natural correlation with psychoanalysis, in relation to some of these historical case studies. Else Frenkel-Brunswik [Polish-Austrian Jewish psychologist] was a central thinker for viewing monoculture through the lens of ambiguity from the start. It became clear that this was not a new subject for artists, who have either explored forms of monoculturality, or been guided by it, even if they are not necessarily using the term directly.

NA: How did you come across Frenkel-Brunswik, who is relatively unknown?

NH: It was when I was undertaking my research for the Gothenburg Biennial that I came across her work. I didn’t refer to her for that particular project, but she became a significant reference for ‘Monoculture’. At the very core

of this exhibition, and also in the project on secularity, are questions of equality and freedom, ultimately asking: What kind of society do we want? Attached closely to this – and what L’Internationale is largely concerned with – is the question of the role of art and cultural institutions in society.

NA: Essentially, the exhibition presents a history of ideas and ideologies of the twentieth century. Yet there is no clear trajectory, no chronology. There are certain groupings – relating to language or agriculture, for example; historical moments like the section that addresses *Négritude*, or intellectual projects as is the case with the publications around psychoanalysis. How did you structure the exhibition and decide on these groupings of works?

NH: It was about combining positions that seemed to make sense thematically, and that are connected. The word ‘monoculture’, as we learned from the conference, comes from agriculture. This relationship to agriculture recurs throughout and is also centrally located to the exhibition. So most people will experience Åsa Sonjasdotter’s work on the industrialisation of agriculture and the development of monocultural farming practices, which sits in proximity to N. S. Harsha’s work reflecting on the high suicide rate among farmers in India who have been forced to adopt monocultural techniques. The idea of ambiguity was crucial as well, as we’ll discuss I’m sure, and from there came building blocks into other case studies and practices.

As always, there is a lot of intuition. Then, there are pragmatic questions, because individual artworks need certain conditions like space or light, along with the given architecture. At M HKA, when you come up the stairs to

the exhibition space, you arrive right in the middle – and I like this quality of starting in the middle. It felt important not to lead people by the hand with the route, and experientially speaking, to relate the spatial design to the idea of monoculture, thus privileging people’s subjectivity.

Entartete Kunst, including works by (L-R): George Grosz, Lovis Corinth, Karl Hofer. Photo: M HKA

NA: Yes, the architecture of M HKA is really constructive for this show. The space is asymmetrical, and you don’t present a progression from a beginning to an end – people have to figure out a journey for themselves.

NH: Exactly. Still, we had to transform the space quite a bit, in order to create different zones that would feel as ‘natural’ as possible. I wanted walls to look like solid walls, as if they had always been there. But there is a differentiation between the white walls and the wooden walls. in my mind are more connected to this notion of ambiguity.

NA: So the white wall, the white cube, is also a form of monoculture?

NH: Yes, broadly speaking. The white walls are the background for case studies of monoculture – from the dominant ideologies of the twentieth century to attempts at artificial universal languages, like Esperanto. The wooden walls are the backdrop for works by Carol Rama and Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, as well examples of Entartete Kunst [so-called ‘Degenerate Art’] paintings, or the writings of Frenkel-Brunswik and Ursula K. Le Guin. There are exceptions to the rule, but that was the basic principle.

NA: Let’s turn to some specific examples in the exhibition to understand your approach to relating different histories and ideas. For example, in one section, material related to the Non-Aligned Movement appears close to Jonas Staal’s *Freethinkers’ Space* (2008 – ongoing). Nearby there is Francis Fukuyama’s book *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992). How were these constellations conceived?

Foreground: Jonas Staal, Vrijdenkersruimte Vervolgd (Freethinkers’ Space Revisited), 2012. Photo: M HKA, Wim Van Eesbeek

NH: With the *Freethinkers’ Space*, and the connection with artefacts related to the Congress for Cultural Freedom, I learned about this through Jonas Staal, at the conference he organised in Amsterdam in early 2020 on propaganda and art. The Congress for Cultural Freedom, was used for Cold War-era soft power in the US – for example with the exhibitions of Abstract Expressionism that toured the world. So, there was a relationship around art and exhibitions being used for propaganda – and there were many examples of this in the twentieth century. Close to Staal’s work, there are projects related to censorship and freedom of expression, and in a certain way to do with culture wars, which is intended to mirror the artefacts of Belgian and American culture wars at the very opposite ends of the exhibition. For me, Fukuyama also brings this idea of culture war, but in the geopolitical sense, rather than on a national scale, and this sits in relation to artefacts from the Non-Aligned Movement. Sille Storihle’s film *The Stonewall Nation* (2015), exploring Don Jackson’s attempt to create an exclusively gay colony in California in 1970, draws out the subject of nationhood and nation-building.

Yes, because Benedict Anderson’s 1983 book *Imagined Communities* also appears here. That is in relation to Maryam Najd’s work *Grand Bouquet* (2010 – 12), which is also about nationhood. It brings all the official national flowers of the world into one image. Many of the species selected are non-native, which brings up the question of migration, which is a key aspect of Staal’s *Freethinkers’ Space* in the sense that it looks at how political positions view culture and censorship, including examples of supposed ‘Islamic censorship’ as the result of ‘political correctness’.

Simone de Beauvoir, Pour une morale de l’ambiguïté (The Ethics of Ambiguity), 1947. Photo: M HKA, Wim Van Eesbeek

NA: First edition books are a major part of the show. You have given them a special treatment, inset into the walls, with a glass covering, so that the books in a way become artworks or images. Did you want to set up a relationship between them and the artworks, to make a catalogue or an inventory of these ideological or theoretical positions?

NH: We always described them as artefacts, so I don’t think of them as artworks. But they are exhibited in a way that is not typically seen in a contemporary art museum. Some of the ideas that I wanted to introduce are not always present in artworks, and I don’t like the idea of artworks illustrating ideas either. Still, I wanted to bring philosophical thought into the dialogue.

I still think that there is something exceptional about the experience of an original object as part of a visit to a museum. For example, with the posters from the Non-Aligned Movement – more specifically from OSPAAAL (Organisation of Solidarity for the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America) – to see the originals is somehow more meaningful than seeing reproductions. They have a beautiful material quality, and are very artistic. The other important thing is that all of these items become assets to the museum, as we acquired them as part of our research. So, I hope this can signal that these can be research tools for anybody, eventually. A big part of the thinking with this exhibition is how we can archive and hold the material so it becomes useful in future to interested artists and researchers. There is also material from the exhibition research that we didn’t exhibit, but that we still have.

NA: Let’s move to the Alptekin room. This is one of the most fascinating rooms for me, precisely in trying

to understand the relationship you've set up between ideas and images, or ideology and art let's say. We've got Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), we have Friedrich Nietzsche, Sigmund Freud, Hannah Arendt, Julia Kristeva, and then there's the work by Alptekin and Carol Rama. This room feels significant both for your proposition for the exhibition and for your ideas around ambiguity, which you explore in your recently edited volume *The Aesthetics of Ambiguity*. It is the only space in the show where we are enclosed in wooden walls, enclosed in walls of ambiguity, let's say. It has lower lighting – I imagine because of the light requirements for the Carol Rama works, but you have the sense of being in a much more intimate, reflective space.

NH: Three publications with contributions by Frenkel-Brunswick are displayed in this room: *The Authoritarian Personality* (1950), which she co-authored with Theodor Adorno and Daniel Levinson, as well as her texts 'Personality theory and perception' (1951) and 'Environmental Controls and the Impoverishment of Thought' (1953). They're really scientific papers, but sur-prisingly accessible to the untrained reader, like myself. They outline the developments of her thinking on 'ambiguity tolerance and intolerance'. This was her way of exploring ethnocentricity and the authoritarian mind. Her central thesis is that our levels of tolerance towards ambiguous things are connected to our social outlook. 'Ambiguity', for Frenkel-Brunswick, could be perception of another person – how tolerant we are when encountering someone of, say, ambiguous race or gender – and how desirable or undesirable we find that experience. But, significantly, it could be other ambiguous things or experiences, which brings us into the realm of aesthetics. I also placed art in the category of ambiguity, as something that can reflect

and even influence people's tolerances. Someone who is ambiguity intolerant typically possesses the characteristics of the monocultural mind. And the more ambiguity tolerant we are, the more socially inclusive we are, according to the evidence. The example of Entartete Kunst – holding up avant-garde art as an aberration – is a crucial case study of ambiguity intolerance in the art-historical context. It offers a window onto extreme intolerance in society as a whole. Her ideas directly connect the liberalisms of perception, cognitive function and tolerance, and open up the question of the emancipatory potential of ambiguity as something that can influence tolerance. But of course, what is considered ambiguous is relative. The presence of Frenkel-Brunswick's ideas here is symbolic, but it's important that they are included. It's actually rather hard to get hold of her books, so now we have them as research assets.

NA: So how would you say this is symbolic in a way the other books weren't? Because she's not putting forward an ideology as such.

NH: No, but her ideas are very much born out of the experience of escaping extreme ideology. Many pioneering psychoanalysts were Jewish people living in Austria or places occupied by the Nazis. They fled – for example Freud went to England, and so did Melanie Klein. There are some people who consider psychoanalysis as something that escaped the Holocaust. Not surprisingly, psychoanalysts wanted to explore the human mind, including its extremities. There are these two sides to science in the early twentieth century – the pseudoscience of eugenics and ideas of 'racial hygiene', and the science that flourished after escaping those extreme experiences.

NA: Eugenics appears in the adjacent room.

NH: Yes, and all of the books in this Alptekin/Frenkel-Brunswick room are in contrast. Freud’s book *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), and Arendt, of course, tell us something about extreme ideology and its public influence. It is interesting that during the 1940s both psychoanalysis and philosophy, in the case of de Beauvoir, are unpacking the notion of ambiguity. De Beauvoir is another key figure for the exhibition because her work is really about freedom, which connects with artistic freedom.

NA: If I look at the Carol Rama works in relation to de Beauvoir’s publication *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, are you pointing to Rama’s work as an exemplar of ambiguity?

NH: Certainly. With de Beauvoir, there can be a misunderstanding around existentialism, which is too often understood as nihilistic. She clarified that it is actually about emancipation. To really understand ourselves as human beings, we are not guided by ideology, whichever that might be, and we’re not guided by some higher power, but we’re unresolved as individuals, we are fundamentally ambiguous. Only when we understand this, can we use ambiguity as a starting point for emancipation. I have a lot of sympathy for this idea. For me, Carol Rama is someone who really lived this, seeking that freedom. She makes this art in the era of fascism in Italy. Her work is about exploring the fundamental ambiguity of the body, sensuality, physicality, and ideas like abjection. She is a brilliant example of someone who was really practising artistic freedom, which mirrored her everyday life.

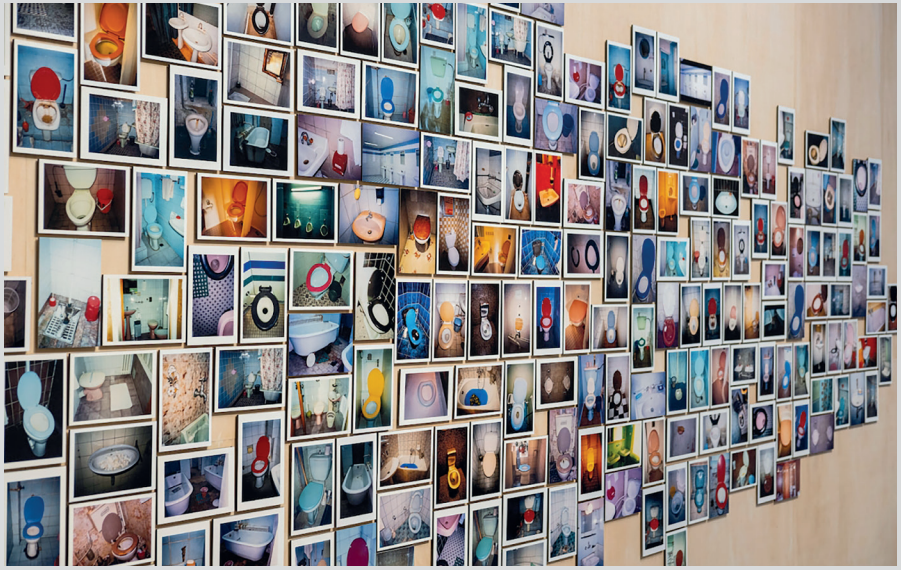
NA: Then Alptekin’s work *Global Digestion* (1980 – 2007), which consists of hundreds of photographs of types of toilets – why is it placed here?

NH: I found Alptekin’s work bound several things rather succinctly. There’s a lot of exhibits that are doing several different things at once here, in my mind. I found this to be a good position for Global Digestion because, firstly as a work about human digestion, it connects directly with the work of Harsha and Sonjasdotter on food production. It relates to Nazism as it talks about the concept of hygiene. It relates to the idea of abjection in Julia Kristeva’s writing, which appears in this space too, and finally it relates to globalisation, which we see in the nearby grouping that explores liberal capitalism. Alptekin was an artist fascinated by the conditions created by globalisation. He took these photos during his travels around the world over several decades.

Carol Rama. Photo: M HKA, Wim Van Eesbeek

NA: Reading *The Aesthetics of Ambiguity*, which is somehow an accompaniment to this exhibition, something came up that I’m trying to negotiate; that is, the relationship between ambiguity and autonomy. Where autonomy, in the modernist sense insists on a separation between art and politics, from a political

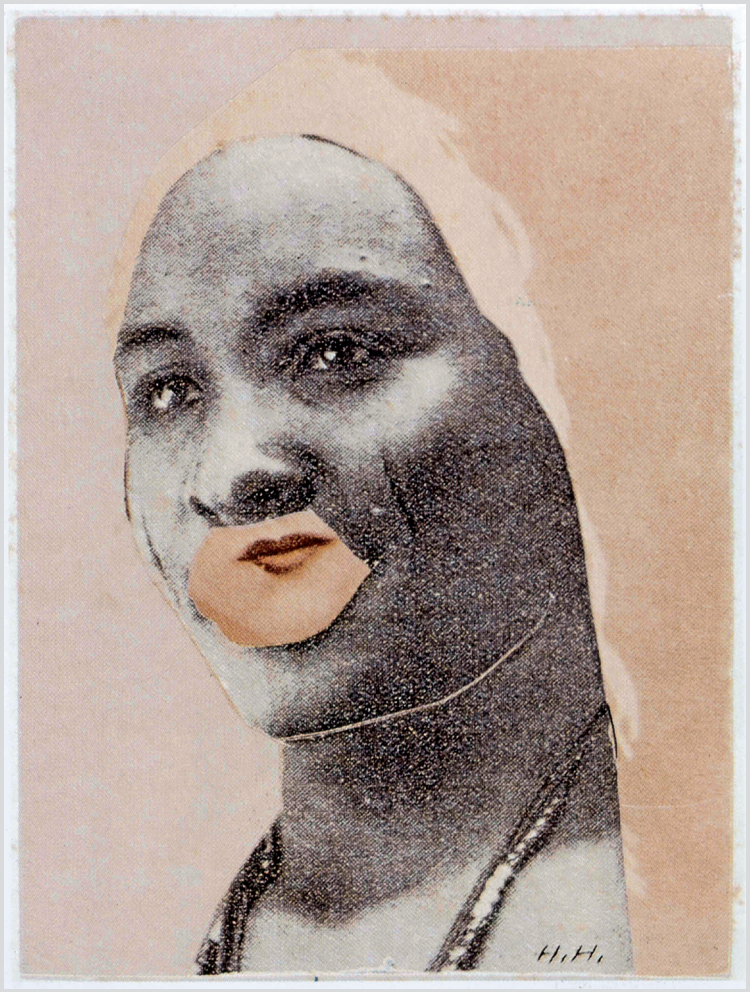
position, ambiguity also evokes a certain detachment from ideological positions. It seems in this room you’re making a proposition between forms of ideology as they’re put forward by certain thinkers and political projects, and the space that art can occupy, with artists like Rama and Alptekin, which is more like the space of ambiguity. So the central proposition is that the capacity of art to occupy or create a space of ambiguity makes us more open to diverse political perspectives. Art that is put at the service of a political project is not included in the show, like the Black Panthers for example. Occasionally there is a direct correlation between the artworks and a political project, but overall you seem to be making a case for separating those. So I’m wondering about your position on autonomy, as art being drawn back from direct engagement in a political agenda.



Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin, Global Digestion, circa 1980 – 2007.
Photo: M HKA, Wim Van Eesbeek

NH: When you say ‘autonomy’, I assume you use it in a Kantian sense. That takes us into another interesting philosophical conversation. I would myself use the word secular. The condition of art is a reflection of the process society has gone through in terms of secularisation.
I don’t agree that what has been described as autonomous is somehow purposeless; rather, art is no more autonomous than science and medicine, or politics, say, because they’ve gone through the same process of secularisation, and these of course have an important use value. This is a well-established analysis, including in art. For me ambiguity is not purposeless either; on the contrary, I think there is a societal use value here, and this is what I’m trying to investigate. You’re right to say that in the exhibition we selected examples where art is instrumentalised. I don’t have any issue with art being utilised in emancipation movements, but I do think then that these movements shouldn’t discriminate against practices and people that sit outside of their own cultural conception. When I talk about secularisation, in principle it also allows diverse practices and practitioners to coexist. Contemporary art can exist alongside more traditional art practices connected to belief systems, for example. Ambiguity – aesthetically, methodologically or ontologically speaking – can and has been part of political or societal projects, in all kinds of ways. There remains a use value there, and this can connect directly to the question: What is an institution for? Perhaps it’s to make people more tolerant of ambiguity.

NA: Hannah Höch comes in the room next door. Next to this work (*Mischling (Mixed Race)*, 1924), one of the key pieces of the show, we’ve got the eugenics publications by authors such as Eugen Fischer and Hans FK Günther. If the Rama somehow speaks with ambiguity, the Höch is placed as a counter to those extreme positions.



Hannah Höch, Mischling (Mixed Race), 1924. Photo: Liedtke & Michel

NH: Absolutely. Höch was considered a degenerate artist. What I really like about her work is that she deconstructs the anthropological gaze, which I imagine, in the twenties, was a radical thing to do, and particularly meaningful in the German context. It is necessary to point out that although eugenics is associated with Nazism, many of its

roots are elsewhere, in Britain and the US, and the field was then co-opted by the Northern Europeans. Much of this pseudo-scientific research looked specifically at mixed-race people – it seems to me that much intolerance is linked to the experience of ‘the Other’, and the ambiguity of this experience. For many racist people, encountering a mixed-race person is somehow even worse than encountering someone they can categorically judge to be black, because the ambiguity exacerbates their intolerance. Some ‘research’ was made by the Germans on mixed-race people in Namibia when it was a German colony. German colonial history fed into Nazi constructions of racial purity, superiority and ethnocentricity. The reality is that there is no scientific basis for racial difference.

NA: Arguably one of the uncomfortable aspects of the exhibition is the way in which certain political projects and histories are presented in close proximity. First of all, it’s difficult to exhibit a copy of *Mein Kampf*, or books on eugenics, or the project of Nationalist Socialism. You open yourself up to the critique that you are somehow legitimising that as an ideology. Yet what is in some respect more uncomfortable is when those violent histories are placed alongside emancipatory struggles – in the case of Négritude, for example – without attending to the respective historical conditions and violence of those moments. This could be seen to suggest a form of equivalence between these ideas as simply different examples of monoculture.

NH: I was always conscious of this possible risk because I did not want people to find any moral equivalence between these exhibits. So I aimed to come up with a display that was mindful of this. It was largely a spatial

question: how you lay out an exhibition and how people experience things as they move around. For example, I haven't positioned the section on Nazi ideology directly next to the section on Négritude, while there is proximity between the section on Nazism and exhibits related to colonial history, because German colonial history informed Nazism as a biological movement and the development of 'race science'. There is another trajectory entirely to Négritude as a postcolonial emancipation movement. I believe members of the public would have said something if they thought some moral equivalence was being made, and nobody has. Also, every exhibit is contextualised with a description text. You can't control how people think, of course, that is against the logic of how people experience things. But a visitor would have to make a large mental leap to find moral equivalence between many cases here.

NA: We talked about this a lot with the 'Considering Monoculture' conference, where we were mindful not to present a monocultural view on monoculture. With the exhibition, there was a wish to present a spectrum of ideologies and histories, without explicitly saying that one is more desirable than another, but rather to understand them as societal manifestations. You don't present the public with clear or prescriptive ethical judgements, and the exhibition texts are not didactic. So there is a certain ambiguity around the display of these different movements and histories.

NH: I'd say that there are some indirect ethical judgments, but yes that the dialogues between diverse figures are important. I was interested in, for example, putting somebody like Ayn Rand in dialogue with Joseph Beuys. There are more connections there than

you might imagine. They ultimately believe in different types of libertarianism, albeit brutal right-wing libertarianism in the case of Rand's *Objectivism*, and left libertarianism in the case of Beuys's *Third Way*. Beuys is a sort of left libertarian because he believed in emancipation as an individual, but also in having a responsibility to society. Occasionally, judgment can come out of juxtapositions.

It was important not to position myself or the museum as belonging to the typical liberal left often associated with the arts. Partly because, as a liberal person myself, I see that what was once considered 'liberal' has now become fragmented. And because I don't think that museums are only for a liberal left audience. As a public institution, we should be open to society more broadly. The point is to generate tolerance, or perhaps an agonistic space. I don't particularly see my position as ambiguous; rather, I am trying to ask basic and fundamental questions – to as broad an audience as possible – about what kind of society we might want.

NA: Andy Warhol seems like the artist featured most in the show, which I was surprised by – why Warhol, and why does he appear in several places? You have his *Birmingham Race Riot* (1964) print, so you've also used him to reference certain historical moments.

NH: Warhol is an artist who embodies the ideology of liberal capitalism, with a kind of criticality. In terms of talking about capitalism in relationship to art, it had to be Warhol. Yes he does refer to historical subjects, but it's more about appropriation and repetition, reflecting on the influx of images, repetition and surface.

Foreground: Andy Warhol, Birmingham Race Riot, 1964.
Background: Kerry James Marshall, Untitled, 1998 – 1999. Photo: M HKA

NA: You could say that Warhol is on the one hand the embodiment of capitalist culture and ideology, but on the other hand, through mass appropriation and the endless turning out of images, he has an ambiguous relationship to his subjects…

NH: I think he is actually quite ambiguous when it comes capitalism. His studio was literally called The Factory. He was really about working with that system, exploiting that system. But I think he had a criticality towards the system at the same time.

NA: Now we are in what I loosely call the ‘identity politics’ section, typified by the catalogue of the 1993 Whitney Biennial, next to which two of Lynette Yiadom-Boakye’s portraits are hung. How are we to read this? As an accompaniment or foil to the question of identity politics?

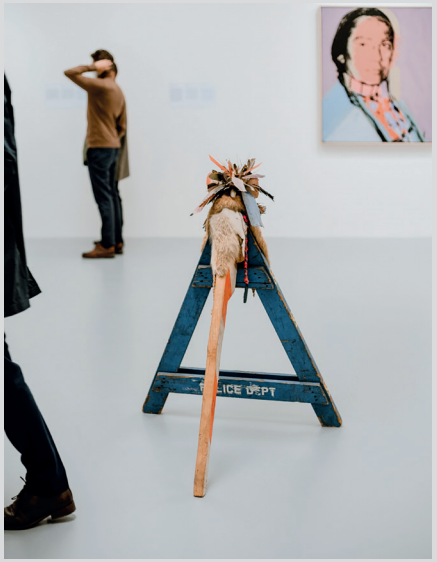
A walk-through of the exhibition ‘MONOCULTURE – A Recent History’ at M HKA (Antwerp)

Hannah Höch, Mischling (Mixed Race), 1924. Photo: Liedtke & Michel

NH: I think there is a constructive discussion to be had about the Americanisation of identity discourse, and whether this paradoxically generates another sort of monoculture. Many years ago, I visited Lynette Yiadom-Boakye in her studio, and through her eyes, her work is not really about ‘black representation’. It is more about invention, the tradition of portraiture, being able to create characters as an artist. People apply the lens of blackness to her work in a way that, I think, creates a dilemma for her. It is different from the Kerry James Marshall that hangs opposite – his work is really about blackness, and what he calls ‘rhetorical blackness’. Yiadom-Boakye is often put in the same category, and that’s not always insightful.

NA: Then the Philip Guston painting, *Law* (1969) – I guess his inclusion came well before the debate around the postponement of his planned retrospective by three US museums and Tate Modern, London…

NH: There was never any question of not exhibiting the Guston painting. I’m interested in how he was originally an abstract expressionist painter, and then at a certain point he made a decision to do something entirely different, which he became famous for – the sort of cartoonish, almost absurd painting style. In a way, this work is to do with his family history and biography. For ‘Monoculture’, it was a way to talk further about the American context, and the fact that the US had their own equivalent of white supremacism in his lifetime, which sheds light on the contemporary. This is why I placed it in relation to artefacts from the American eugenics movement and racist literature.



Jimmie Durham, Tlunh Datsi, 1984. Photo: M HKA, Wim Van Eesbeek

NA: The display sets up a complicated quandary for a visitor – to look at these publications and then to look at Yiadom-Boake’s work, to read these images in relation to these histories of violent ideas. You make challenging demands on the viewer, to figure out their relationship to what they are looking at.

Before we stop I want to move into this room, where we have orientalism, via Edward Said, writer John Berger, and art historian and broadcaster Kenneth Clark. There are three corresponding television programmes, so there is a reference to the mediation and popularisation of certain ideas through television.

NH: This room tries to deconstruct the hegemonic gaze, and then to open up to new perspectives, which is one of the basic principles of postmodern relativism. So this zone is more in the mode of questioning modernity and the dominant Western worldview.

NA: In relation to these three positions Haseeb Ahmed’s vast installation, *Ummah HQ* (2020) and Rasheed Araeen’s *Nine* (1968). It is one of the moments in the exhibition where the artworks and ideas (as presented through artefacts) coalesce. Araeen’s work speaks to the original notion you discussed for the exhibition – equality. He talks about the relationship between symmetry and equality, of one side equalling the other.

NH: Ahmed’s installation refers to the mutually supporting architectural form of the Muqarna in Islamic architecture as a metaphor for the construct of the ummah [the community]. This seemed relevant in relation to [Belgian architect] Luc Deleu’s work *Global Center for Interracial Communication* (1980), which tries to imagine architecture

as a way to solve conflict and racial intolerance. He’s a utopian architect rather like Yona Friedman. These sit in contrast to material related to experiments with architecture in regions like North Africa and India by European modernist architects, where architecture was a colonial export.

Araaen came from a training in engineering to become a pioneer of minimalist sculpture, but as someone coming from outside Europe, he was rejected for it. I was interested in this story in relation to claims of modernist universality, as well as in comparison to [German minimalist] Charlotte Posenenske’s work, which also utilises industrial techniques. Araeen has said that Western modernity was an expression of European identity. However, over time, other places have gone through periods of modernisation, in ways distinct from Western modernity. Using the word ‘modern’ to describe this process might not even be correct, but we are stuck with the vocabulary that we have inherited.

I’m interested, philosophically speaking, in [Israeli sociologist] Shmuel Eisenstadt’s proposition of multiple modernities, which has been adopted in political philosophy as a way to talk about the new global reality: the fact that the Sinosphere, for example, is constructing its own modernity, so that we end up in a situation not of universal experience, but rather of competing modernities. This idea will be at the core of our Eurasia project later in 2021.

NA: To close let’s bring the ‘Monoculture’ project back to the context of L’Internationale. L’Internationale clearly aligns itself with the history of the socialist project. The title comes from the nineteenth-century workers’ anthem and the history of Marxism, which in your exhibition appears through an early edition of *Das Kapital*.

The confederation stands behind pluralism and openness, while at the same time aligning itself with this particular historical trajectory and ideology. In this way, its politics appear unambiguous! Following the argumentation of your exhibition – and to make a provocation – do you see the alignment with the socialist trajectory, or some of the other positions the confederation takes up, in relation to the decolonial, for example, as a certain form of monoculture?

Haseeb Ahmed, Ummah HQ, 2020. Photo: Evenbeeld

NH: As you say, rhetorically speaking L’Internationale talks about strength in difference and plurality, but I do think there have been some assumptions that we are all somehow the same, that we have the same approach to institutions and practices, and that this can result in a kind of groupthink. I’m not sure that is the reality actually. For example, I think it’s quite clear that some of the

institutions are invested in what you refer to as decoloniality, and some aren’t, yet there has been an assumption that all of us are. I don’t think that M HKA really is – it perhaps addresses the same concerns through a different approach – and I wouldn’t say SALT is either. We all work with a sense of critical engagement, and have some shared goals of practicing equality, wanting to create open-minded and reflective institutions, and of course to present great art. But maybe we do this in contrasting ways.

NA: Do you think there is more work to be done in practicing openness and plurality across the museums in the confederation?

NH: I think it’s important that we are not a monoculture. That’s essential for the health of the confederation. The reality is that there are differences here already, but perhaps we need to work better to understand them.

Exhibition view, Monoculture – A Recent History, M HKA. Photo: Evenbeeld

Approaching Research Exhibiton Practices

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Publisher	University of Gothenburg and ‘George Enescu’ National University of the Arts
Editors	Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson
Year	2021

Rasheed Araeen's now famed "The Other Story" (1989) belies a clear curatorial strategy, presenting a narrative of "Afro-Asian artists in Britain" through a chronological art historical display.[1] Structured around an historical trajectory from the post war generation to younger artists working at the close of the 1980s, "The Other Story" offered a survey of black artists as a counter narrative to the history of British art previously presented as the sole purview of white men. In contrast, Okwui Enwezor's equally famed "The Short Century" staged twelve years later (2001) addressed political imaginaries and struggles, and historicised them, without the works displayed being subordinated to an overarching or monolithic historical thesis. "The Short Century," via works of art, film and photography, supplemented by large sections of archival material, delved into the history of anti-colonial and liberation movements across the continent of Africa.[2] Both exhibitions are part of a lineage of exhibitions beginning in the 1980s that sought to de-centre white European art histories and epistemologies. As such, these exhibitions engaged the political (in regards to both their address to colonial histories and the legacy of such histories within the art establishment) whilst positioning themselves – to different degrees – as research endeavours. These two examples manifest very different exhibitionary strategies that have been partly thematised, partly explored in the discourse on the curatorial that emerged prominently in the 1990s and 2000s, across a newly expanded and globalising art system.[3]

This essay, written from the perspective of a researcher/curator working within the context of both a museum and a university, reflects on elements of the discourse of the curatorial as it pertains to the exhibition. It begins by considering ways in which the address to the curatorial sought to position itself beyond the perceived limits of the exhibition, and placed emphasis on its epistemological possibilities to engage the political, rather than alignment within a clearly definable political genealogy or political programme. Key to this curatorial move, was a distancing from the representational limits of the exhibition. The foregrounding of "knowledge work" over the exhibition, placed "research," a slippery term both within art schools and wider art systems, front and centre. In the second part of the essay, I turn to how the nexus of research-curatorial-exhibition practices has been reframed by theorists and curators that have turned to the space of the exhibition as a site to both announce and mobilise research practices. Drawing on specific examples, I look to approaches and methods within exhibition practices that attempt to collapse, or deviate from the gap between the epistemological-political promise of the curatorial and the representational limits of the exhibition. The third section of this essay, responding to the comparatively under-developed language available to describe methodologies and strategies for mobilizing research practices within the space of the exhibition, considers different historiographical and methodological approaches that may be instructive for thinking through the intersections of the exhibition, research and the political. My objective is not to put forward exemplary case studies, or a resolved thesis on the relationship between exhibitionary practices, enquiry and the political. Rather, in its necessarily fragmented and selective nature, this essay samples different strategies, via examples as well as speculations, that might contribute to ongoing debates within the field. Underpinning this is an interest in process and methodology from the perspective of exhibition practice, understood as one element in a much larger constellation of the exhibitionary.[4]

The curatorial's epistemological claims on the political

Emerging between the art market and the academy in the 1990s and early 2000s, "the curatorial" has positioned itself as a distinct form of knowledge work — a counter-hegemonic and counter-epistemic field of operations.[5] Claims on the political within curatorial discourse often rest within the ways knowledge is produced and performed. Formative for this was a deliberate strategy to situate the curatorial away from the "practical tasks of curating."[6] Irit Rogoff, co-founder of the influential Curatorial/Knowledge programme at Goldsmith's London made the distinction in 2013 between curating as a "professional practice" and a "set of skills and practices, materials and institutional and infrastructural conditions" that go into the making of "platforms of display" (exhibitions, public programming etc.) Within this formulation, curating/exhibition-making was understood as operating within the fields of representation. In a recent essay focusing on artistic manifestos in South East Asia in the 1970s, art historian Seng Tu

Fin, makes a salient observation regarding the relationship between discourse, representation and the exhibition. Drawing on Chantal Mouffe's discourse theory, Seng writes: "Discourse analysis can be applied as a methodology to study exhibitions by conceiving exhibitions as a discursive site where discourse competes for hegemony to lock the meaning and representation of art in a specific way."[7] It is precisely this "locking of representation" that the curatorial was seeking to move beyond, conceiving itself rather as a "trajectory of activity" and an "epistemic structure."[8] At the same time, it is the exhibition as a "medium of representation" as Patrick Flores describes it, "that bears the weight of its colonial origins and is constantly threatened by post-colonial critique," that discourse on the curatorial was attempting to manoeuvre around.[9] According to Rogoff and others, it is the ability to produce knowledge away from the field of representation that lends the curatorial its political potential. Artist Sarah Pierce summarises it succinctly when she writes: "To think about radical formations of knowledge that occur through the curatorial is to undo its functional, structural relationship to curating – whether as a potential methodology or as a mode of operating – so that we might begin to address the curatorial as a political engagement, as it connects to knowledge production in ways that are neither good nor bad, but are unpredictable and difficult to manage."[10]

These early statements on the curatorial claim the political via a double move to delink it from exhibition-making, thus foregrounding its "epistemological invention." One outcome of this, as Tom Holert has recently surveyed, is a whole host of artistic practices and institutional programmes that centre different forms of knowledge production via educational, para-educational and discursive activity, resulting in what Marina Vishmidt terms "infrastructural critique," all of which have foregrounded processes of research, rather than their formal instantiation or transmission in formats such as the exhibition.[11] At the same time, the curatorial's claims as an "epistemological field of activity" and its related claims on the political have dovetailed with the ongoing discussion over the value and position of artistic research within the academy. Figures such as Sarat Maharaj and Henk Borgdorff have argued for the specific nature of artistic research in relation to other academic disciplines, whilst Holert's recent publication *Knowledge beside Itself* (2020) takes

a wider lens in assessing how artistic and creative research practices engage in what Maharaj first introduced in 2002 as "knowledge production."[12] The push back against the neoliberalisation of the university, over the past twenty years, has similarly engendered a resistance to producing definable "outputs," or quantifiable results (the role of exhibition often being included, to some extent, under the heading of "outputs" or "results") within the domain of artistic and curatorial research.

The curator and art historian Yaiza Hernández Velázquez points out the pitfalls in this discursive turn that characterised the development of the "curatorial." Hernández Velázquez pointedly remarks that this new "philosophy of the curatorial," that "leaves behind" questions of the exhibitionary and the institution, is at risk "of becoming theoretically abstract, of falling into a theorecticism that functions in advance of a problem, leaving any politics in abeyance while putting 'discourse first.'"[13] Here, it is important to acknowledge that as a field of study or domain of practice the curatorial does not lay claim to a lineage within concrete political struggle or a specific strand of political science.[14] Rather it draws from a large discursive and theoretical library, whilst pivoting towards political subjects, histories and contexts. This, as Hernández Velázquez suggests, opens up a gap, disconnect, or outright contradiction between its epistemological claims on the political and the subjects it seeks to address, or rather, between its methodological approach and its subject matter. This is particularly visible within the realms of the exhibition and its institutional context, tied as it is to its forms of display, representation and what theorist Ariella Azoulay describes as the "imperial technologies" of the museum. A comparison with cultural studies, another self-described transdisciplinary field of epistemological enquiry, is instructive.

Cultural studies, as it emerged in the 1970s and 1980s in Britain, was a specifically motivated response to Thatcherism and its renewal of a British post-imperial racial project.[15] Its ideological and theoretical genealogy lay in Marxism and post-Marxism via the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Ernesto Laclau that were central within the so-called Birmingham school, founded by two influential public intellectuals Stuart Hall and Richard Hoggart in 1964. Indeed,

whilst cultural studies and the New Left emerged as a response to a crisis in Marxist thought, it was indebted to these "routes" as Hall would say, whilst directly addressing specific contexts through its use of conjunctural analysis. Equally, through the methodological approach of "theories of articulation," different practitioners within the field where able to work within and across a shared strategy whereby method and subject matter were informed by one another, even if the application of cultural studies would morph and change considerably as it moved away from its first formations in the UK.[16] In contrast, the curatorial does not have a clear set of theoretical foundations or a specific conjuncture which it is seeking to address beyond the broad parameters of the global contemporary, making its claims on the political that much more slippery, and any attempt at a survey of the field risks feeling reductive. The curatorial draws on a "network of practices," theoretical frameworks and institutional contexts that need to be considered through the specificities of its inquiry. What's more, it sits as both a by-product of, and critique-in-chief of, an increasingly globalized, capitalised art system, on the one hand, and the neoliberalisation of the university on the other.[17]

Returning to the question of exhibition, a number of researchers and curators (we could look to the work of Jelena Vesić, Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri amongst many others) have deployed the exhibition as research tool away from an academic context, reorienting beyond standardised European references, art histories and epistemologies.[18] The exhibition has received renewed focus within the context of research-based practice and discourse, both focusing on the process of "exhibiting" and, very recently, on the broader "question of exhibition," where the exhibition has been addressed by writers such as Samia Henni, Saul Marcadent and Steven Henry Madoff through a range of lenses that includes exhibition as writing, editing and friendship.[19] My colleagues and I have proposed (in the editorial for a recent journal issue on these questions) that what emerges in this recent address to the exhibition is a push and pull between an analysis of the "world-making and ordering techniques of exhibition – what might be broadly called its onto-epistemological register – and the pragmatic and technical questions of exhibitionary apparatus, its operational register."[20] In many respects,

it is within this push and pull that this essay's own reflections are situated.

The curator Anselm Franke, known for his development of the so-called "essay exhibition," has provided a considered reflection on the exhibitionary in relation to research.[21] Instead of focusing on the perceived problem of the exhibition "illustrating" research (its representational limits), he has aimed to tackle what he describes as the "positivism" problem in presenting thematic exhibitions that aim to give a singular account of a topic or history.[22] At the same time, there have been attempts to square the circle between the epistemological or non-representational claims of the curatorial with the form of the exhibition, or the process of exhibiting. Curator and theorist Doreen Mende, has advocated for "non-representational research" within the context of exhibition-making. Mende cogently argues for the "spatiality" of the exhibition – "a concept to give shelter for the network of practices as non-representational research that displaces places while remaining aware, entangled, and inevitably attached to the power of display." Mende further argues that spatiality "is a concept that links the spatial and political anew."[23] Arguing according to a different conceptual framework, curator and writer Joshua Simon addresses the exhibition as a "Cosmogram," seeing the contemporary art exhibition as "a way to organize meaning." Simon describes the Cosmogram as a "diagrammatic illustration." Structured via a series of terms that includes model, demonstration, constellation and – what he describes as "late-capitalist terms" – metastability, mesoscopic, interface and platform, the essay looks to exhibitions as "conceptual maps."[24] In other words, Simon assesses the exhibition's possibility to use non-representational devices to create meaning and knowledge. The interventions from Mende and Simon are helpful in understanding how the form, spatiality and conceptual structures of the exhibition afford meaning-making beyond the representational. Within this configuration, research and the epistemic are re-situated within the field of exhibition practices.[25]

Across the art system, the word research has been attached to a number of exhibitions, institutional programmes and practices with varying degrees of precision, whilst the so-called "research exhibition" has emerged as almost a genre of sorts. Within this alignment however, there remains a certain fuzz-

iness, an uneasiness even, over how knowledge/research is understood, and how it is transmitted or instantiated through exhibitions. This fuzziness is often generative, allowing research practices to move away from the restricting definitions imposed by academic structures that foreclose access to other forms of indigenous or non-normative knowledge and which stand opposed to the colonizing implications of research. What interests me, however, is looking at practices that operate within the gap between the curatorial's epistemological promise and the problematics of representation imposed by the exhibition and its institutional context. What remains under-developed is a language to describe strategies, methodologies and operations within research-exhibition practices that seek to close, or collapse that gap.[26] How does the framing of a research-exhibition enquiry that engages different political imaginaries – its modes of historiography, its use of different oral, performative or sonic devices – allow for the unfolding of meaning within the exhibition that is not limited to representing ideology? And how might this lead to a more nuanced understanding of the possibilities (and limits) of the exhibition to engage the political, given there is no common theoretical or ideological base from which it proceeds?

Turning to Practice

Any attempt to address the exhibition in toto, as if it comprises a singular definable field, will ultimately succumb to over-generalization or become lost in abstraction. Turning to specific examples, however, can help to reveal the ways in which some research-exhibition practices engage the political not via epistemological claims nor by seeking to represent a set of identifiable historical or ideological positions. Franke's "essayistic" approach to exhibition-making for example, exemplified in his multi-year project "Animism" (2012 – 17) deploys the affordances of the exhibition to explore and subsequently question the ontology of art and images. This sprawling research and exhibition project interrogated the implications of animism as an anthropological, historical, aesthetic field that demarcates boundaries between animate (including "conscious") and inanimate things. These boundaries, the project infers, have had lasting implications for the "boundary making practice of

"Animism", Haus de Kulturen de Welt, Berlin, March 16 – May 6, 2012

colonial discourse."[27] Whilst the exhibition drew on a vast historical archive of images and texts – from British anthropologist Edward Burnett Tylor's Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom," (1871), where the term is introduced, Étienne-Jules Marey's La Machine Animale (1873), and the iconic skeleton dance of Walt Disney fame (1929) right up to the photographs of Candida Höfer where the museum itself is treated as an inanimate specimen to be investigated – the result, as Franke writes, was not an "exhibition … about animism, as if it were an object. Instead, it is about the making of boundaries – those boundaries that decide, in the last instance, the status of things within a social order, decide actual in – and exclusions."[28] Central to Franke's approach to the exhibition was the premise that the fact of animation and the event of communication are one and the same. Within the context of the exhibition this involves a recalibration – or collapsing – of the object of study, and the act of studying, whereby the history of animism as a field of study is in dialogue with the artistic propositions that reflect on the modern, colonial processes of categorisation and classification that characterise the museum. Within the space of the exhibition itself (which I saw at HKW in Berlin), this meant that visitors moved between the first edition publications of Georg Ernst Stahl, David Hume and Sigmund Freud, and, for example, the works of Hofer, and the long term investigative work by Agency into objects that resist classification. Here knowledge about animism is not being produced, rather it is, itself, being animated and subsequently called into question, through the exhibition in a form of a continual feedback loop. In this sense the exhibition is central (as both device and attendant object of study) in relaying and instantiating the research.

In "Monoculture: A Recent History" curated by Nav Haq at MuHKA, Antwerp, there was a similar attempt to collapse the object of study and the mechanisms of the exhibition and institutional display.[29] The exhibition presented itself as a gathering of diverse forms of monoculture across the twentieth century spanning a complex configuration including Négritude, eugenics, nationalist socialism, neoliberal capitalism and identity politics as well as looking to agriculture and language as different, though related forms of monoculture.[30] However, the exhibition was not about monocultures per se. Rather it sought to position art, and what Haq describes as its "ambiguous status" as a possible foil for the reductive and limiting nature of monocultural tendencies. Underpinning this proposal was the "ambiguity tolerance" thesis put forward by psychoanalyst Else Frenkel-Brunswik. Brunswik posits that a lack of tolerance to ambiguity made people less accepting of difference and more prone to sympathize with monocultures. Art, the exhibition put forward was essentially ambiguous and was therefore a vital tool in ensuring that we remain open to different cultural and ideological positions. Within the exhibition this ambiguity was embodied by artists such as Hannah Höch, Carol Rama or Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin (presented next to first edition books by Brunswick, Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt). These were positioned in contrast to monocultural positions, ranging from eugenics to free market capitalism. Haq deployed scenographic devices to delineate these differences, with the more "ambiguous" (open, accepting) positions largely appearing on unpainted wooden walls, as opposed to the more ideologically representational field of the white walls (or white cube) hosting monocultures. The exhibition, a vast research endeavour across the history of art and ideas in the 20th century, was

"Monoculture, A Recent History", Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst Antwerpen (M HKA), Antwerp, September 25, 2020 – April 25, 2021

also a very self-conscious reflection on art and images occupying non-representational space. This self-described "philosophical" push for ambiguity was seen as offering a means to a more accepting, egalitarian society and one in which museums, as public institutions, have a central role to play. Whilst "Monoculture" is noteworthy for its veiled critique of exhibition practices that overtly align themselves with identitarian positions, the exhibition reveals the complexities when attempting to trouble the relationship between art and ideas, representation and ideology. Scenographic devices, such as those used in "Monoculture" to delineate 'ambiguous' art from its representational/ideological counterpart – or the inclusion of books to point to ideologies, philosophies or histories – are always, themselves, in danger of operating as representational signifiers that need to be "read."

In contrast, it feels generative to think through ways in which the sonic and the audio might serve as a device to sidestep representational signification. In "Force Time Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies," the recent edition of Sonsbeek, the exhibition, sited across multiple venues, delved into the "intercourse between labour and the sonic."[31] What interests me about "Force Time Distance" is the manner in which the exhibition simultaneously investigated the history of sonic and phonic encounters, as these appeared through labour practices and movements across geographies, and how these played out in the space of the exhibition itself. In this sense the very counter-representational qualities of the sonic allowed the exhibition to evoke histories and contexts without recourse to representation. In the 1990s artists such as Tony Cokes were pairing text and sound to push back against forms of representation as it pertains to questions of political and cultural Blackness. "Force Times Distance" used the sonic as a curatorial device to trouble the representational field of the exhibition and its history-making capacities. The exhibition was not simply the means through which to play back different moments where music is used as a vehicle for solidarity, resistance and community, rather it considers "noise," as Aude Christel Mgba describes it, as a "disrupting force" against the normal order of things, as well as calling into question what sounds are heard and what sounds remain within process of history-making.[32]

"Past Disquiet", Sursock Museum, Beirut, July 27 – October 1, 2018. Photo: Christopher Baaklini

These are three examples of research-exhibition practices that pivot away from what Haq and curator Tirdad Zolghadr would call their "aboutness" – the specific subject matter an exhibition claims to address – to questions of form and strategy, questions that were largely overlooked in claims for "epistemological invention."[33] Curators, myself included, are very adept at describing what an exhibition is "about." What is much harder for us to describe is how the specific form of the exhibition offers both a physical and conceptual space to both trouble and augment our understanding of any subject of address, or how the process of transmitting or instantiating research in the form of an exhibition relates to the frame of the enquiry. Such an approach does not necessarily entail the ontological and philosophical claims made in Animism or Monoculture, but might take place in relation to highly specific case studies. For example, a defining feature of the multi-part exhibition "Past Disquiet: Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition Palestine 1978," curated by Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri (2015 – 19) was a deeply reflexive approach to their investigations into a single art exhibition.[34] Rather than recreate or represent the original exhibition – held in Beirut and organised by the cultural arm of the PLO; as a possible seed-collection for a future museum of Palestine –

either through works of art or installation shots, the exhibition became the site to consider both the solidarity of networks of artists, politicians and militants involved in the 1978 exhibition, as well as to openly disclose the inevitable disparities in multiple accounts of a single event. Central to this approach was the collapsing the separation between research strategies and the focus of their inquiry. The exhibition's catalogue for example, the starting point for Salti and Khouri's research undertaking, was projected on a large screen overlooking a gallery packed with carefully compiled configurations of archival material – the pages of the catalogue being turned to signal the researcher's indebtedness to the book. Or the choice to prioritise and display the interview as research strategy which enabled the cast of protagonists involved in the exhibition, to be reassembled into a single room, echoing the alliances of friendships and politics within the original project, whilst also pointing to Salti and Khouri's own role in awakening the "ghosts" of the 1978 exhibition. Understanding and naming this entangled relationship between a research frame, the processes and conditions of research and its manifestation in the form of the exhibition – such as in Past Disquiet – offers a model that is rooted in a specific inquiry (in this case the 1978 exhibition and subsequent trans-national artistic alliances) whilst critically assessing and reflecting on the form that an inquiry takes. It offers a less emphatic and declarative model, but rather a more provisional one, through which a research process can take place. Most importantly perhaps, it brings the question of research – or epistemological invention – into the space of the exhibition.

"Past Disquiet", Sursock Museum, Beirut, July 27 – October 1, 2018. Photo: Christopher Baaklini

Some speculations on strategies for research-exhibition practices

The cases of "Monoculture: A Recent History" and "Past Disquiet" point to two distinct strategies within research-exhibition practices respectively – the former interrogating a social construct that appears across geographies and societies; the latter beginning from a single exhibition. Such differences, as with the contrast between "The Other Story" and "A Short Century" point to different historiographic models. There is substantial literature on the forms of collecting and display within art museums, with Tony Bennett's account of the power structures at play within the "exhibitionary complex" marking a significant intervention, as well as exposing the process of history-making itself, or what Azoulay calls "an imperial discipline."[35] Less work has been done, however, to consider the question of historiography in relation to research-exhibition practices and how this might further develop a discourse on the nexus of exhibition-research practices. Here, then, I want to turn to methodologies and approaches from different disciplines – not as any prescriptive approach, but rather as a speculative comparison across disciplines.

The practices of "microhistory," developed in Italian scholarship in the 1970s, whereby a focus on a highly specific case study serves as a means to illuminate a larger subject – in the case of the seminal work of microhistory by Carlo Ginzburg, he focuses on the life and beliefs of one Menocchio, a miller in 16th Century Italy, in order to explore the worldviews of, and the pre-Christian elements within, peasant culture at the time of the counter-reformation – appears as one possible approach.[36] The approach of microhistory, where particular figures, practitioners or moments – as opposed to distinct historical trajectories or an interrogation of a single theme – offers a less totalizing method of conducting a research-exhibition enquiry. Such an approach is a hallmark of many artistic research practices. Hira Nabi's recent, and compelling, film All That Perishes at the Edge of Land (2020), shown at "Forces Times Distance," focuses on the daily lives and the stories of labourers on the Gadani ship-breaking yard in Balochistan, Pakistan. The imagery of the destruction of vast, obsolete ships becomes the occasion to ruminate on the devastation of the vitality of

oceans; the perilous working conditions for those at Gadani; and the chasm of power and wealth that marks different protagonists across global trade. Nabi's film, as the curators of Force Times Distance remark, uses Gadani as a contextual inquiry, akin to a microhistorical approach. Within the realm of exhibition-research practices, drawing on microhistorical approaches – or using specific contextual inquiry, whether that be through a bringing together of different sites via constellating art works and archival material, or honing in on one example – seems to offer an approach to exhibition-research practices that resists totalizing statements, grand narratives or the tendency to "positivism."

Conjunctural analysis, a hallmark of cultural studies, might offer another way of thinking through, or approaching research exhibitions that take a historical period or singular context as its point of reference. The approach, derived from Marxism and taken on by researchers such as Lawrence Grossberg, Jennifer Daryl Slack and Stuart Hall, to name only a few, aims to assess how different intersecting forces – political, cultural, and economic – come to bear on a historical moment.[37] What defines conjunctural analysis, and as a result, cultural studies at large, is an investigation into context and how that subsequently produces meaning. In other words, the object of study is not predefined, rather an unpicking and subsequent articulation of different layers emerges through the work. As Jennifer Daryl Slack describes:

> Seen from this perspective, this is what a cultural study does: map the context – not in the sense of situating a phenomenon in a context, but in mapping a context, mapping the very identity that brings the context into focus […] To put it another way, the context is not something out there, within which practices occur or which influence the development of practices. Rather, identities, practices, and effects generally, constitute the very context within which there are practices, identities or effects.[38]

The exhibition at SALT Istanbul, "How Did We get Here" (2016), curated by Merve Elveren, drew on a series of specific sites – from the Radical Democrats in Turkey; the counter cultural

magazine Sokak; and the protracted building of the third bridge across the Bosphorus – to assess the different cultural and political forces in 1980s Turkey, as the country embarked upon implementation of a free market system.[39] The result was an exhibition that offered a relay across sites and practices that, when bought together, offered precisely what Slack describes, as "mapping the context." This context was not the backdrop for a foregrounded object of study, but was the study itself. The exhibition was not structured chronologically nor according to clear thematics, but rather as a series of interrelated and interlocking microhistories. There are of course substantive differences between the way in which conjunctural analysis and cultural studies articulates different social and political forces, and a constellation of practices and displays within an exhibition display, yet the approach of cultural studies offers a model for thinking through and naming exhibition practices that draw upon different sources and references to engage with a given context.

"How did we get here", SALT, Istanbul, September 3 – November 29, 2015

The practice of what historian Saidiya Hartman terms "critical fabulations" and theorist Ariella Azoulay's notion of potential history, where histories are told that sit at the intersections of what is found and excluded from the archive, offers another

model to think about the ways research driven exhibition-making might address historical and political imaginaries through the lens of singular stories. Hartman's approach is first developed in the article "Venus in two acts" (2008), where she negotiates the history of the murders of two women on a slave ship crossing the infamous Middle Passage. Critical fabulation is approached as a means "to tell an impossible story and to amplify the impossibility of its telling," to reconstruct "what could have been." This drive holds strong affinities with Azoulay's notion of potential history as they both insist on the ways in which past events should not be considered part of a closed-off history, but constitutive of an ongoing present.[40] In her recent exhibition "Hidden Labour Across" curator Doreen Mende evokes Azoulay's notion of potential history to create imagined alliances across what she describes as "violent erasures of history."[41] In keeping with the approach of both critical fabulation and potential history, the point of departures are the lives and conditions of specific people, here workers, that forges "potential" linkages across the GDR in the 1970s to workers in South Korea and contemporary India. This device, which simultaneously foregrounds lived experiences, whilst "fabulating" on possible, imagined connections across time – a chronopolitical "rewinding" to borrow Azoulay's phrase – offers a speculative model for mobilizing research practice (both curatorial and artistic) that gives form to Mende's proposition of non-representational research within the domain of research-exhibition making.

Mindful of the very different respective cultural politics, my intention is not to propose a simple equivalence here between Ginzburg's microhistory, Azoulay's potential history and Hartman's critical fabulation. Rather, I wish to point to possible references, models, sites of intersection with different forms of historiography, that might augment current debates on research-exhibition practices – and specifically the use of the archive within exhibition practices. Hartman and others, such as theorist Achille Mbembe, have outlined the limits, exclusions and violence of the archive, and there has been extensive discussion and critique of the use of the archive in contemporary art exhibitions.[42] Whilst figures such as Soh Bejeng Ndikung have considered how the archive may be embodied, performed or transferred beyond its materiality, it seems that consider-

ing the different strategies of Ginzburg, Azoulay, and Hartman might also enrich methodological invention for engaging with history and the archive through exhibition.[43]

The way in which curatorial practice and discourse – within academic, institutional and artistic contexts – leans on, and is a subject to, an unwieldy constellation of forces, makes any attempt to weave together disparate pronouncements and debates into an overarching analysis, selective and partial. The aim in this essay, has been a tentative probing at naming different tendencies and trajectories and identifying possible strategies within the field that point to the shifting relationships across and between the exhibition, research practices and the curatorial. In tandem with some of the examples and proposals I have suggested, what is needed is a more detailed consideration of architectural, scenographic, formal and material strategies of research-exhibition practices. By outlining some of the contours of this relationship, as well as speculating on possible approaches, I hope to have contributed a little to the reflection on research-exhibition practices – modes of formulating; strategizing; and the application of diverse historiographical methods within such practices – that might, as Stuart Hall would say, push the conversation "a little further down the road."[44]

"Hidden Labour Across", Kunstverein Leipzig, Leipzig, August 22 – October 21, 2020

NOTES:

[1] "The Other Story" took place at the Hayward Gallery from 29 November 1989 to 4 February 1990. It was curated by Rasheed Araeen and included the work of 24 artists: Rasheed Araeen, Saleem Arif, Sonia Boyce, Frank Bowling, Eddie Chambers, Avinash Chandra, Avtarjeet Dhanjal, Uzo Egonu, Iqbal Geoffrey, Mona Hatoum, Lubaina Himid, Gavin Jantjes, Balraj Khanna, Li Yuan-chia, Donald Locke, David Medalla, Ronald Moody, Ahmed Parvez, Ivan Peries, Keith Piper, Anwar Jalal Shemza, Kumiko Shimizu, Francis Newton Souza and Aubrey Williams. It travelled to the Wolverhampton Art Gallery from 10 March to 22 April, 1990 and the Cornerhouse Manchester from 5 May to 10 June 1990. It had four chronologically structured sections: 'In the Citadel of Modernism'; 'Taking the Bull by the Horns'; 'Confronting the System'; and 'Recovering Cultural Metaphors'. For documentation and a detailed analysis of the exhibition see https://www.afterall.org/exhibition/the-other-story/

[2] "The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa, 1945–1994" was curated by Okwui Enwezor. It was presented at the Museum Villa Stuck, Munich from 4 February to April 22 2001; The House of Word Cultures in the Martin Gropius Bau, Berlin, from 18 May to 22 July 2001; the Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago, from 8 September to 30 December 2001; and at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Centre and The Museum of Modern Art, New York, from 10 February to 5 May 2002. The exhibition was structured in sections including: modern and contemporary art, film, photography, graphics, architecture/space, music/recorded sound, and literature and theater, all linked to an historical framework. Artists included in the exhibition were: Georges Adéagbo, Jane Alexander, Ghada Amer, Oladélé Bamgboyé, Georgina Beier, Zarina Bhimji, Skunder Boghossian, Willem Boshoff, Frédéric Bruly Bouabré, Ahmed Cherkaoui, Gebre Kristos Desta, Uzo Egonu, Ibrahim El-Salahi, Erhabor Ogierva Emokpae, Touhami Ennadre, Ben Enwonwu, Dumile Feni, Samuel Fosso, Kendell Geers, Kay Hassan, Kamala Ishaq, Gavin Jantjes, Isaac Julien, Kaswende, Seydou Keïta, William Kentridge, Bodys Isek Kingelez, Vincent Kofi, Rachid Koraichi, Sydney Kumalo, Moshekwa Langa, Christian Lattier, Ernest Mancoba, Santu Mofokeng, Zwelethu Mthethwa, John Muafangejo, Malangatana Ngwenya, Thomas Mukarobgwa, Iba Ndiaye, Amir Nour, Uche Okeke, Antonio Olé, Ben Osawe, Ouattara, Gerard Sekoto, Yinka Shonibare, Malick Sidibe, Gazbia Sirry, Lucas Sithole, Cecil Skotnes, Pascal Marthine Tayou, Tshibumba, Twins Seven-Seven, Susanne Wenger, and Sue Williamson. The extensive catalogue includes reproductions of works alongside contextual archival material. See Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *The Short Century. Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945- 1994*, Prestel, 2001.

[3] Discourse on the curatorial developed in the 2000s with the emergence of a number of graduate programmes. A specific discourse on the curatorial emerged, primarily out of European universities and publishers. A small selection of indicative texts and edited volumes includes: P. O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse" *Issues in curating contemporary art and performance*, Intellect, 2007. pp. 13–28; I. Rogoff, & B. von Bismarck (eds.), *Cultures of the curatorial*, Sternberg Press, 2012; J.-P Martinon, (ed.), *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Bloomsbury, London, 2013; S. Cook, Graham, (eds.), *Rethinking curating: art after new media*, MIT, 2010.; P. O'Neill (ed.) *Curating Subjects*, De Appel/Open Editions 2007. In addition, an expanding discourse on curating emerged that responded to the expansion of the art system during the 1990s via figures such as Viktor Misiano who produced the first Russian language volume on curating. See Viktor Misiano, *Five lectures on Curatorship*, Garage Publishing Program/Ad Marginem Press, 2015. Other significant contributions to the discourse on curating and the curatorial include the collective What How and For Whom (WHW) who have reframed curating and the production of exhibitions by calling for a consideration of the economic and labour conditions implicit in the conceptualization and realization of exhibitions. A major manifestation of this approach to curating was the 11th Istanbul Biennial *"What Keeps Mankind Alive?"* Istanbul, 2009. Zdenka Bodavinac's directorship of the

Moderna Galerija in Ljubljana has been crucial in developing the field of curating and the role of institutions in the shifting geopolitical landscape of the 1990s. See Zdenka Bodavinac, *Comradeship: Curating, Art and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe*, Independent Curators International, 2019. Major contributions to the discourse on curating from a post-colonial framing were made by Okwui Enwezor's 2002 documenta11. See Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Documenta11:_Platform 5*, Hatje Kantz, 2002. More recently curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung has explored curating and the curatorial form from the perspective of the sonic and the body. See his recent collection of essays *In a While or Two We Will Find the Tone: Essays and Proposals, Curatorial Concepts and Critiques*, Archive Books, 2020.

[4] For example, there is not the space here to address the exhibition as "event" as approached by the growing discourse of exhibition histories or what they term the "making public" of art, or to significantly address the institutional/colonial context of the museum and forms of display.

[5] See for example Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck "Curating/Curatorial" in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, edited by Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, and Thomas Weski, Sternberg Press, 2012; Sarah Pierce, "The Simple Operator" in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Bloomsbury, 2013. p. 99; Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung "On est ensemble. Ça va waka. A Few reflections on navigating the Xenopolis" in Nora Sternfeld (ed.), *Cumma Papers #22*, Helsinki University, 2017; Doreen Mende, "Exhibiting as a Displaycing Practice, or, Curatorial Politics", in Milica Tomić and Dubravka Sekulić (eds.), *GAM.14 Exhibiting Matters*, Jovis/TU GRAZ, 2018.

[6] Irit Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field', in Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013. p. 42.

[7] Seng Tu Fin, "The Age of the Manifesto: The Discursive Struggle between the 'New' and the 'Real' in Exhibitions", in Biljana Ciric (ed), *From a History of Exhibitions towards a Future of Exhibition Making: China and SouthEast Asia*, Sternberg Press, 2019, p. 58.

[8] *Ibid.* p. 44.

[9] Patrick D. Flores, "The Exhibition Problematic and the Asian Dislocal", in *History of Exhibitions towards a Future of Exhibition Making: China and SouthEast Asia*. Sternberg Press, 2020. p. 335.

[10] *Op. cit.* p. 100.

[11] Marina Vishmidt introduced the term "infrastructural critique" in her essay "Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural", in Maria Hlavajova and Tom Holert (eds.), *Marion Osten: Once We Were Artists*, (A BAK Critical Reader in Artists' Practice), Valiz, 2017.

[12] Tom Holert provides an extensive summary and bibliographic references for these debates in his recent book *Knowledge beside Itself. Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics*, Sternberg Press, 2020, pp.63-83.

[13] Yaiza Hernández Velázquez, "Imagining Curatorial Practice After 1972", in Paul O'Neil, Simon Sheik, Lucy Steeds, & Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, MIT Press/CCS Bard/Luma Foundation, 2019, p. 261.

[14] This is not to suggest that curatorial projects do not, or should not, address political projects (which is arguably one of the defining feature of the development of research-driven curatorial projects since the 1990s), nor is it to suggest that they are not invested in political projects (whether it be diversifying institutions, decolonising processes, labour rights etc). Rather, this is to simply acknowledge that discourse on the curatorial is not tied to a specific political trajectory or embedded within a specific political project or programme. Something that might usefully be contrasted with, say, the project of cultural studies as developed by Hall and Hoggart. Of course, there are substantial discrepancies between the macro-level theorising taking place within theories of articulation and within the discourse on the curatorial as a very particular subgenre of practice within a highly specific sociocultural field. However, my point is to identify the difficulty in locating, concretely, where the claims on the political lie within the curatorial, if they are not to be read through the histories and subjects that are addressed in an exhibition, book, conference etc.

[15] See for example Houston A. Baker Jr., Manthia Diawara and Ruth H. Lindeborg (eds.), *Black British Cultural Studies: A Reader,* Chicago University Press, 1996.

[16] For an excellent reflection on theories of articulation see Jennifer Slack, "Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies", in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), Stuart Hall: *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1996, p. 112-27.

[17] The term "network of practices" first emerged within the PhD Forum – CCC — HEAD, Geneva of which I was a member. It was developed in the text "Situating our Experiences: A Proposal for Doctoral Research as a Network of Experiences" by Nick Aikens, Denise Bertschi, Michaela Büsse, Lucas Cantori, Paola Debellis Alvarez, Doreen Mende, Camilla Paolino, Hélène Soumaré, Melissa Tun Tun, Elena Yaichnikova, that appeared in Aurora Fernández Polanco and Pablo Martínez (eds.), *Re-visiones*, No. 8, 2018.

[18] Jelena Vesić has for example turned to models of self-organisation to "actualise" research within the context of the countries emerging from former Yugoslavia. See "Post-Research Notes: (Re)search for the True Self-Managed Art" in Paul O'Neil and Mick Wilson (eds.), *Curating Research*, Open Editions/De Appel, 2015. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung founded Savvy Contemporary in Berlin in with the expressed aim "to reflect on colonialities of power [Anibal Quijano] and how these affect histories, geographies, gender and race." See Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, "The Globalized Museum? Decanonization as Method: A Reflection in Three Acts'", *Mousse Magazine*, April- May, 2017. Url: http://moussemagazine.it/the-globalized-museum-bonaventure-soh-bejeng-ndikung-documenta-14-2017/ (accessed 15 February 2021); Rasha Salti and Kristine Khouri's exhibition and research project "Past Disquiet. Artists, International Solidarity and Museums in exile," is discussed at length in Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti (eds.), *Past Disquiet. Artists, International Solidarity and Museums in Exile*, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2018.

[19] See for example Milica Tomić and Dubravka Sekulić (eds.) *GAM.14 Exhibiting Matters*, Jovis and TU GRAZ, 2018. In the introduction the editors write: "The act of constituting exhibition, as a closed temporal and spatial event, becomes a screen obfuscating the production relations, labour, the economic and social situation, and ultimately the conditions of exhibiting as such. In this constellation, we introduce the rupture between exhibiting and exhibition as a way to confront the appropriation and erasure that takes place when the work of art, and the relations that produced it, enter the exhibition." See also the recent issue of *PARSE Journal: On the Question of Exhibition*, Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminah, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wislon (eds.) Url: https://parsejournal.com/journal/

[20] See the editorial for *PARSE Journal* Issue 13 *On the Question of Exhibition*, Part 2. https://parsejournal.com/article/editorial-4/

[21] See the conversation between Anselm Franke and Juan Canela "An 'Undisciplined' Form of Knowledge: Anselm Franke", *Mousse Magazine*, May, 2017. Url: https://www.moussemagazine.it/magazine/undisciplined-form-knowledge-anselm-franke/ (accessed 12 October 2021)

[22] See Anselm Franke, "Notes on the Research-Based Exhibition: Dialectical Optics and the Problems of Positivism", in Milica Tomić and Dubravka Sekulić (eds.) *GAM.14 Exhibiting Matters*, Jovis and TU GRAZ, 2018. Franke's explanation of the essay exhibition and its resistance to positivist announcements that illustrate research, is also worth noting here. See for example Anselm Franke, "Exhibitions as Research". Url: https://research.louisiana.dk/videos/anselm-franke#.YCp8NS2ZPUo (accessed 15 February 2021)

[23] Doreen Mende, "Exhibiting as a Displaycing Practice, or, Curatorial Politics", in Milica Tomić and Dubravka Sekulić (eds.), *GAM.14 Exhibiting Matters*, Jovis/TU GRAZ, 2018.

[24] Joshua Simon, "Exhibition as Cosmogram", *PARSE Journal* Issue 13 *On the Question of Exhibition*. Url: https://parsejournal.com/article/the-exhibition-as-cosmogram/

[25] It is worth noting that Franke, Simon and Mende were all participants in the previously mentioned Curatorial/Knowledge programme.

[26] The research as an exhibition is addressed directly by Simon Sheikh in his essay "Towards the Exhibition as Research", in P- O'Neill and M. Wilson (eds. *Curating Research*, De Appel/Open Editions, 2014. p. 32-46. Paul O'Neil has recently explored the relationship between research and the exhibition through the language of "escape." See "Epilogue: Exhibitions as Curatorial Readymade Forms of Escape", in P. O'Neill et al. (eds.) *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, MIT, 2019. pp. 499-509.

[27] See the introduction to "Animism: Episode 1. A Report on Migrating Souls in Museums and Moving Pictures." Url: https://animism.e-flux.com/episode1/ (accessed 21 September 2021)
[28] See Anselm Franke, "Animism. Notes on an Exhibition", *e-flux journal* 36, July, 2012. Url: https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/
[29] "Monoculture: A Recent History" curated by Nav Haq, M HKA, Antwerp, from 20 September to 25 April 2021. Url: https://www.muhka.be/programme/detail/1439-monoculture-a-recent-history
[30] For a more detailed discussion of the exhibition see Nick Aikens and Nav Haq, "A walk-through the exhibition 'MONOCULTURE: A Recent History' at M HKA (Antwerp)", *L'Internationale Online*, https://www.internationaleonline.org/programmes/our_many_europes/monoculture/180_a_walk_through_the_exhibition_monoculture_a_recent_history_at_m_hka_antwerp_with_nick_aikens_and_nav_haq_in_conversation (accessed 21 September 2021)
[31] Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, "Force Time Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies", in Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (ed.), *Force Time Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies*, Archive Books, 2021. p. 25.
[32] See Aude Christel Mgba, "A Different Philosophy of Noise" in Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung (ed.), *Force Time Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies*, Archive Books, 2021, p. 175.
[33] See Nav Haq and Tirdad Zolghadr, "A General sort of adversity to the 'aboutness of things'", in Pascal Gielen and Nav Haq (eds.), *The Aesthetics of Ambiguity. Understanding and Addressing Ambiguity*, Valiz, 2020, pp.186.
[34] See Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti (eds.), *Past Disquiet. Artists, International Solidarity and Museums in Exile*, Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2018.
[35] See Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, Verso, 2019 and Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex" Chapter 1 in his *Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays*, Routledge, 2018.
[36] Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worm*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980. This is widely regarded as the first example of the methodology of microhistory. See Sigurður Gylfi Magnússon and István M. Szijártó, *What is Microhistory? Theory and Practice*, Routledge, 2013.
[37] Conjunctural analysis is perhaps best exemplified in Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke, Brian Roberts, *Policing The Crisis: Mugging, the state and law & order*, Birmingham 1978. See also John Clarke, "Doing the Dirty Work: The Challenges of Conjunctural Analysis", in Julian Henriques and David Morly (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Conversations, Projects and Legacies*, Goldsmiths Press, 2018. Url: https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/19747/1/Stuart%20Hall_OA_version.pdf
[38] Jennifer Slack, "The theory and method of articulation in cultural studies" in David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (eds.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1996. p. 125.
[39] Url: https://saltonline.org/en/1313/how-did-we-get-here (accessed 21 September)
[40] Hartman's formulation of critical fabulations was developed in her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments. Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval*, 2019 having first been introduced in her earlier essay, "Venus in Two Acts", Small Axe, vol. 12 no. 2, 2008, p. 1-14. . Url: https://cpb-us-w2.wpmucdn.com/campuspress.yale.edu/dist/1/2296/files/2017/09/Saidiya-Hartman-Venus-in-Two-Acts-1a1v7bq.pdf
[41] Url: https://entangledinternationalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FIN_Hidden_Labour-Across_inter∞note01_booklet.pdf (accessed 21 September 2021)
[42] See for example Achille Mbembe, "The Power of the Archive and its Limits," in C. Hamilton, et al., (eds.) *Refiguring the Archive*, David Philip, 2002. For an anthology on archive practices within contemporary art see Charles Mereweather (ed.) *The Archive*, Whitechapel Gallery, 2006.
[43] Some of these strategies are laid out by Soh Bejeng Ndikung in In a *While or Two We Will Find The Tone*.
[44] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies", in Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, & Paula Treichler (eds.) *Cultural Studies*, Routledge, 1992, p. 280.

A Daily Practice: An Exhibiton as ...

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From — *I Am Going to Be Yor Last Teacher. A Workbook. Yael Davids*

Publisher — Roma Publications, Amsterdam

Editors — Nick Aikens, Jeroen Boomgaard, Yael Davids, Linda van Deursen and Nadia Schneider Willen

Year — 2023

When I invited Yael to make the exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in 2019, it was to see how the many registers she engages in her work could be folded together: the Feldenkrais Method, the museum's collection; the protocols and personalities of the institution; and her precise aesthetic, spatial and performative sensibility.[1] My hope was that Davids's research, practice and form would speak together as an experiment about and within the rhythms and processes of art and exhibition making.

We were halfway through installing the exhibition in March 2020 when the museum closed abruptly due to the outbreak of Covid-19. When we came to open the museum three months later, we had to navigate a new reality. An exhibition conceived

1 I curated the exhibition *with* Yael, and in close dialogue with Frédérique Bergholtz (guest curator for performance). I was part of the Feldenkrais group that met every Tuesday morning in the Van Abbemuseum during the two years leading up to the exhibition and was one of the supervisors (with Sher Doruff) for Yael's Creator Doctus trajectory across the Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam and the Van Abbemuseum. Over the course of our four years working together, Yael and I became close friends as well as collaborators. I write with *A Daily Practice* from a position of personal and professional proximity, a closeness that both magnifies and blurs things.

through Feldenkrais, of multiple bodies moving on the floor, had been recast. It felt both terminally compromised by inevitable routing and visitor restrictions, but also presciently recontextualised within the pandemic moment. An exhibition whose sensitivities to the body, care, habits, the very notion of *A Daily Practice,* had become heightened in ways we could never have imagined. Returning to anything that was conceived in a pre-pandemic world is fraught, like returning to a place or person you knew when you were a different version of yourself. Relationships to the conditions of work, professional and emotional self-understanding, have all gone through deep, complex permutations. Like many things – these givens have been unravelled and now need to be thought anew. The difficulty lies in thinking them anew from a place of uncertainty and vulnerability.

This text moves between two types of focus. The first thinks through the material and conceptual specificities of *A Daily Practice*, a form of close reading that I find as the most sincere strategy to engage with practice. The second indulges a wider reflection on the form of exhibition itself. By this I mean that writing with *A Daily Practice*, from a position of *thinking through things anew,* I found myself contemplating some of the affordances, strategies and registers of the exhibition at large: the exhibition *as* assembly, as school, as study, as composition and more … as things that overlap and interlace one another.

Exhibition as Assembly

I borrow the notion of 'assembly' from curator and polymath Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung who asks: 'How can we

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, installation view with works by Hilma af Klint, Yael Davids with André Bergen and archival material from the Noah Eshkol Foundation for Movement Notation, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

think of exhibition making as an act of assembly of notions, peoples and histories?'[2] *A Daily Practice* assembled works by – and inferred the lives of – Anna Boghiguian, stanley brouwn, Noa Eshkol, Edgar Fernhout, General Idea, Hilma af Klint/ The Five[3], El Lissitzky, Lee Lozano, Nasreen Mohamedi, László Moholy-Nagy, Bruce Nauman, Adrian Piper and Andy Warhol/Jill Johnston. This assembly as hosting, alliance and formal composition sat within and through Yael's own work, drawing on those in the Van Abbemuseum's collection and others. It folded trajectories and held them in a temporary constellation within the ten galleries before letting them go.

The first gallery was an assembly as epilogue. Yael's poised, haunting installation *A Reading That Loves, A Physical Act* (2017) brought together poet and artist Else Lasker-Schüler (1869 – 1945), writer Rahel Varnhagen (1771 – 1833), expressionist artist Cornelia Gurlitt (1890 – 1919) and Empress Julia Aquilia Severa (d. after 222) – all women whose lives were marked by displacement and a restless pursuit to be visible in the public realm despite their social standing and gender. Yael formed bonds across the two centuries that span their lives: Lasker-Schüler's presence was the most poignantly felt through her plaster death mask; the other women were called upon through letters, some stitched in Yael's hair or composed in collages of single, cut-out letters – a devoted act of care and solidarity. In the following room *Cabinets with Noa Eshkol* (2020) was a wood and glass structure that hosted tens, if not a hundreds of drawings, diagrams and notes

2 See Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, 'On est ensemble et ça va Waka: A Few Reflections on Navigating the Xenopolis', in Nora Sternfeld (ed.), *Cumma Papers #22*, Helsinki: Aalto University, 2017, pp.2 – 13.

3 The other members of The Five were Anna Cassel, Sigrid Hedman, and sisters Mathilda Nilsson and Cornelia Cederberg.

from Eshkol – the choreographer and dancer whose life and work has been a constant companion for Yael. The material selected by Yael included a number of Eshkol's pen and ink diagrams relating to the Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation (EWMN). Devised with architect Avraham Wachman in 1958, EWMN is a system whereby movement is transferred into lines. It was used across fields from dance to physiology and zoology, as well as in Feldenkrais itself. As you moved around the cabinet made by Yael's collaborator André van Bergen with its glass panes that extended outwards and counterbalanced at different points, Eshkol's forms and diagrams were reconfigured.

Working in proximity with the museum's collection, Yael chose practices and forms that resonated with her: stanley brouwn's *steps* (1989) greeted visitors in the foyer – the wobbling image on screen filmed with a handheld camera that invites viewers to move with brouwn through the streets of Berlin, Paris and Amsterdam. Bruce Nauman's movement exercise *Elke Allowing the Floor to Rise Up Above Her, Face Up* (1973) sat across the hall, the improvised movement signalling relations across building and body. Inside the galleries Anna Boghuigian's visceral *daily* drawing practice leaped up and announced itself. The screaming mouth in her *Untitled (The Agony of Yes and No)* (1990) is at once an instinctive, guttural scream and a prompt to picture the jaw, lips, connections with the neck, shoulders, hips and feet – all the muscles and joints that finally produce a scream. Elsewhere artists who were protagonists in Yael's early Feldenkrais classes in conversation with works from the museum's depot were assembled with head of collection Steven ten Thije, beginning with the floating forms of El Lissitzky's *Proun P23 No. 6* (1919) and László Moholy-

Nagy's *Untitled* (1922) in 2018.[4] Courtesy of Frédérique Bergholtz, Yael placed Erik Fernhout's *De Zee* (1962), beautiful waves pressed against the canvas in smudges of blues and whites and sitting, almost too beautifully, in the corner of the last gallery. Boghuigian, brouwn, Fernhout and Lissitzky became formal devices, of lines, shapes, movements and planes and an assembly of lessons and movements within The School. The School, at the very centre of the exhibition, assembled bodies in the eight classes where students, momentarily together, moved on the mustard yellow carpet of the building's central room with eyes closed, looking inward. Next door in the depot, an assembly of works chosen by class members and exhibition collaborators filled the wall with their tastes and readings.

Assembling guests in a project that looks to the collection, and discovering what my colleague Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide pertinently describes as 'an incomplete house', is charged. You point – as Yael did – to absences. Yet to stand in a room with these works – the automatic drawings of The Five, five women who met weekly beginning in 1896 to pray, conduct seances and draw collectively, and then to look across at the diagrammatic in the *The Atom Series* by one its members Hilma af Klint, the exquisite line drawings of Nasreen Mohamedi or the charts, notations and collages of Eshkol – became meaningful in their presence together. The act of bringing together, of convening these forms, practices and lives allowed spiritual, scientific, bodily and performative worlds to coalesce, for the medium work of The Five to cohabit Mohamedi's meticulous and infinitely solitary studio practice; for brouwn's four lines in *steps* to

4 As part of Yael's research trajectory within the museum, she gave three public classes and one closed class with works from the collection.

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, installation of The School, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, *Vanishing Point* (2020) by Yael Davids, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

speak to Eshkol's movement notations, not in ways that form equivalence, but rather that generate new specificity, new singularities *together*. So many of these practices – Mohamedi, Piper, Boghuigian, Af Klint, Lozano, brouwn – are acts of withdrawal as practices carried out in solitude where isolation is a constituent part of daily life haunted by loss and grief. To assemble these practices means to recast withdrawal, solitude, loss *in relation.*

Exhibition as a Set of Affinities

I often quote the artist Celine Condorelli – who writes beautifully about friendship and within the framework of a series of works she made and a publication[5] – from a series of conversations she had with sociologist Avery Gordon on befriending as not only between people, but also ideas, systems, values or what she calls 'elective affinities'. This can include the books one reads, certain ways of thinking, the associations to one's work. Hannah Arendt, as Condorelli tells us and from whom the title of her book is borrowed, defines cultural practices as 'the company one choses to keep in the present as well as in the past'. *A Daily Practice* shows how an exhibition carries affinities, keeps company with ideas and practices 'in the present as well in the past'. Lee Lozano's presence through the abstraction of

5 Céline Condorelli, *The Company She Keeps*, ed. Nick Aikens and Polly Staple, London: Book Works, Chisenhale Gallery and Van Abbemuseum, 2014. The publication was produced in conjunction with Condorelli's exhibitions at Chisenhale Gallery (2 May – 22 June 2014) and the Van Abbemuseum (as part of *Positions #1*, 5 July – 12 October 2014). Condorelli's conversations with sociologist Avery Gordon, which comprise a major part of the publication, were commissioned as part of the think tanks *How To Work Together*, Chisenhale Gallery, London, 26 September 2013 and can be read in full here: http://howtoworktogether.org/events/avery-gordon-talk/.

Untitled (1968) and the list of blunt titles *No Title* (1969) was perhaps Yael's expression of affinity with a life and practice of an artist who moved between highly sophisticated abstractions, visceral explorations of sex and a withdrawal from the (art) world. The projection of *Jill and Freddy Dancing* (1963) was both a mesmerising choreography of steps on a Manhattan rooftop and expression of affinity with Johnston, her writing in the *Village Voice* that blended life and ideas and her championing of the Judson Dance Theater and postmodern dance, which was so formative for Yael's own relationship with performance. Never explicit, these references sat with and through practice in the form of exhibition in addition to (not in place of) their material form as exemplary sets of ideas because she had decided to hold affinity with them.

Exhibition as Articulation

Here I draw, as I have elsewhere, on cultural theorist Stuart Hall's productive use of the double meaning of 'articulate'.[6] The first is, as Hall writes 'to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries with it a sense of language-ing, of expressing, etc'. The second is articulation as linkage. Hall famously uses the example of an articulated lorry 'where the front (cab) and back (trailer) can but need not necessarily be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other but through a specific linkage'.[7] It is 'a connection

6 I first thought with theories of articulation in relation to curatorial/exhibition practice in the essay 'A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1980s', in Nick Aikens and Elizabeth Robles (ed.), *The Place is Here: The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019, pp.22 – 33.

7 Stuart Hall, 'On Postmodernism and Articulation', *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), p.141.Mathilda Nilsson and Cornelia Cederberg.

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, installation view with works by Yael Davids and Adrian Piper, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

that *can* make a unity of two different elements under certain conditions. It is a linkage that is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time.' In assembling these practices, ideas, lives and thus expressing affinity with them Yael articulated them, linked them, creating a momentary, fleeting unitaryness. Af Klint's diagrams of the atom, produced amid huge scientific advancement, were articulated with brouwn's four measured lines drawn sixty years later and Noa Eshkol's movement notation from the 1970s. This articulation does not bind these practices together, for all time, but within the space of Yael's assembly of affinities, invites us to think through what connects them: their mark making, diagramming, measuring and moving.

Exhibition as School

The two central rooms were given over to The School. The first, accessible from the main entrance of the museum's Old Building, contained the depot. Three of the walls were hung from floor to ceiling with works selected by members of the Feldenkrais group and invited collaborators. Opposite were large collages Yael had made on differently coloured cards corresponding to the lessons.[8] Works from the depot were taken each week by Toos Nijssen, the conservator and a long-time collaborator of Yael's, into the room next-door before they were returned after the class. This act sounds simple, but with works from a museum collection whose every move needs to be imagined and described before being executed, like in Feldenkrais as Yael once observed, it required a mobilisation and recalibration of institutional infrastructures.

8 See pp.83 – 132.

The room in which the Feldenkrais classes took place had a massive mustard-yellow carpet and muslin-lined walls to soften the harsh acoustics of the 1930s building. Yael and I learnt early on when conducting Feldenkrais in the galleries that the physical architecture was inhospitable to bodies and voices. It was designed for standing and looking, not lying with eyes closed, listening and moving. Yael's *Vanishing Point* (2020), a sixty-metre-long black textile, cut through the room, hung at different points form the ceiling above. It was raised and tied at two points for each of the classes, a curtain lifted to give space for bodies to lie together.

The protocols for The School were conceived by and with Frédérique Bergholtz, another long-time collaborator of Yael's and whose sensibility permeated the room in which the classes took place. Working with Yael and Frédérique, whose respective artistic and curatorial practices are grounded in performance, I was struck by the time and care given to each detail. We rehearsed how the public would enter, placing their shoes outside the entrance, how we would demarcate the space from the rest of the exhibition during classes by placing a wooden barrier in front of the entrance, the precise place where Yael would sit to introduce the works that would form the basis of a class, how people would get up, gather their things and leave. We plotted every experience and encounter as you would a performance. We pored over each word in describing the programme and protocols, a discipline with language that was itself performative, in the sense that Judith Butler proposes – of performing the reality you want to see enacted. The School, in this sense, was conceived as a set of protocols, a choreography to create optimal conditions for learning, or what I will call study, that echoed the very premise on which Feldenkrais and his method was based.

The programme was divided into eight classes, each based on two to four works. Looking at the titles is instructive: *The sensible and the imaginative – different patterns in creating an image. Back and neck. With works by Bruce Nauman and stanley brouwn*. The title describes the relationship Yael set up between imagining and feeling – where imagining is understood quite literally as creating an image in your mind. This imaging happens during the scanning when Yael asks us to imagine the line that connects one's heel, to the knee and hip. However, it takes on a new role when artworks are introduced. I remember when Yael first gave the class with Nauman and brouwn.[9] I have a precise memory of her describing the imprint of the black rectangle in Nauman's *Untitled* (1973) and the sensation of feeling my own imprint – of my shoulders, back, bottom and legs on the hard floor of the museum, the way the small of my back was curved and not part of the imprint. The central proposition of The School, in this sense, was a form of mapping the collection onto the body, of encountering artworks through the body. It's a remarkable proposition, where through movement, listening to the description of an artwork with your eyes closed while imagining – in the true meaning of the word – I came to experience images through the corporeal.[10] In the exhibition booklet we differentiated between the exhibition and The School. We listed artists based on whether they appeared in the depot of The School or elsewhere in the exhibition. But by placing The School centrally, physically and

9 Yael's first class with these two works took place as part of the three-day programme 'Museum Takeover: Bodies of Knowledge', Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 3 – 5 May 2019.

10 For further descriptions of The School, see the conversation 'On *A Daily Practice*' between myself, Yael, Mercedes Azpilicueta and Megan Hoetger in Nick Aikens and Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide (ed.), *I Think My Body Feels, I Feel My Body Thinks: On Corpoliteracy*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2022, pp.69 – 81.

conceptually *at the core* – from which the other galleries and artists emanated – Yael recast the exhibition *as* school. She invited us to think of the space of the exhibition where learning – not in the sense of being taught, not of the exhibition as classroom, but as a space where self-learning, self-understanding, of reappraising habits and connecting knowledges – was given space. It was a school where, as Yael so beautifully wrote, one was able to 'integrate knowledge from outside the self into the self'.

Exhibition as Study

Thinking the exhibition as school can be extended or stretched to the idea of exhibition as study. I take this from Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. In *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* they inspiringly position study in opposition to credit.[11] Study takes place *in debt*, they say. We do not take something *from* study but rather undertake study as a process to develop self-understanding, to develop individual and collective political imaginaries. The exhibition as school, as assembly, as articulation and a set of affinities, invites us to study, precisely *not* to produce credit or arrive somewhere, but for the practice to be the thing itself. I find strong affinities between this notion of study and that of *A Daily Practice*. Where they differ, and where the exhibition is significant, is that the notion of study takes *A Daily Practice* away from a process in solitude, to one done *in relation* to bodies, ideas, concepts, etc. Study took place on the floor of The School, during Feldenkrais class and permeated the exhibition. Publics were not taught *about* something or received information as

11 See Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Brooklyn: Minor Compositions, 2013.

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, installation view with works by Yael Davids with André Bergen and Nasreen Mohamedi, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

credits. They were invited into a process of study with concepts and movements.

Harney and Moten's 'study' takes place in productive friction, if you like, with the institution. It's impossible to study in the university they say, but that's where study takes place. It takes place there both *despite and because of* its conditions. In a strange echo of this Yael told me that Moshé Feldenkrais said that 'children learn despite school'. Likewise, study in *A Daily Practice*, in exhibitions we could say, takes place *despite and because of* the institution. There are many obstacles to overcome in order to allow study to take place: the museum wants to give credit, to offer legible, graspable things for people to consume and take away; but it remains a place where study is possible, because it is a place of assembly, of affinities and articulations.

Exhibition as Disclosure

Disclosure is the act of making (new or withheld) information known. *A Daily Practice* was part of a three-year research trajectory that, like many processes of (artistic, practice-based) research was not sure of its end point when it started out. As Hall would say, the exhibition 'pushed things a little further down the road'. As a curator and a researcher, I have spent time thinking (and writing) about the entangled relationship between research and exhibition practice, convinced that the exhibition can afford some working through and processing of research.[12] It has specific spatial, aesthetic, temporal conditions that allow

12 For example, see Nick Aikens, 'Approaching Research-Exhibition Practices', in Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson (ed.), *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, Iași, Romania: Editura Artes and ArtMonitor, 2021, pp.54 – 69.

knowledge to be both mediated and produced in ways not possible through discourse, writing and image making. In this working through the artist, curator, organiser, *discloses* markers of their inquiry and opens it up to study without fixing its meaning. The act of disclosure can be uncertain and vulnerable – a making public that exposes things in process. Yael's working through Feldenkrais in relation to artworks and the building were all *disclosed* as were the components of her (shifting) practice as performer, through objects and as a Feldenkrais teacher; as too were her allies in practice: Eshkol, Lozano, Piper, Mohamedi and more. They were not explicated, justified or summarised, but given over. Disclosure in this sense is both generous – you offer something up to others – but it also relieves you of it. To disclose something is to let it go.

Exhibition as Composition

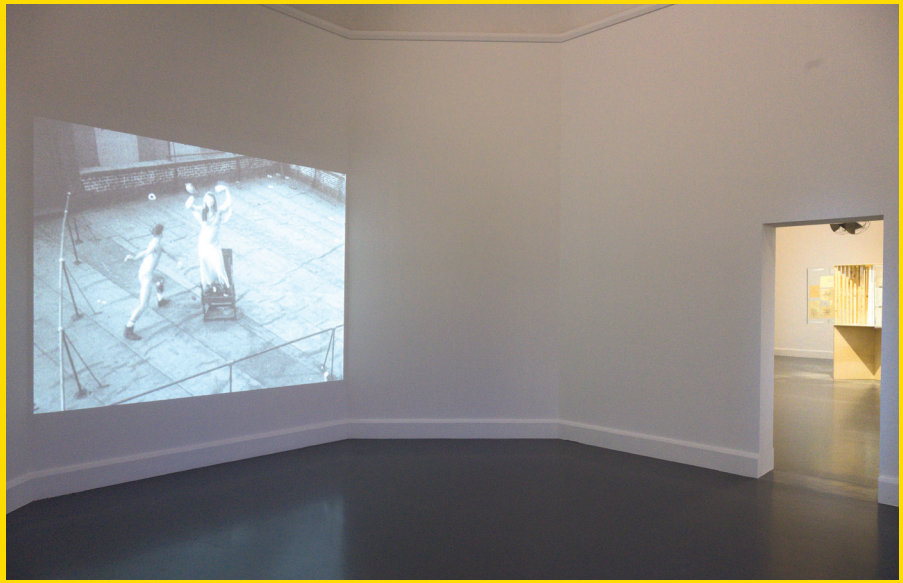
Yael is a formalist. Form becomes a carrier for merging sentiments, politics, feelings; her work in textile, glass and black pigment are formal expressions. Take her hanging glass sculptures, rectangular planes poised delicately but confidently mid-air. They use (or recall) glass produced from the factory in Tzuba, the kibbutz where she grew up that is now a main supplier of glass to the Israeli defence force. Fragility, aggression, elegance, abstraction and transparency hang together in those forms. But placed within rooms, as they were with *Hanging Glass with Adrian Piper* or *Hanging Glass with Edgar Fernhout* (both 2020) they are also – unashamedly, proudly – formal compositions. The modernist white cubes of the Van Abbemuseum, its five-metre ceilings with natural light, its W-shaped parkour, allowed Yael to compose, to draw in three dimensions. In early conversations we discussed how

we might connect the spaces as if a spine or bone ran through them. Yael's exquisite hanging *Vanishing Point* (2020) began in the fourth room, its stepped formation enclosing Lissitzky's *Proun* and Mohamedi's series of drawings, before cutting through The School. The black, flat shape crisply sat on top of the mustard carpet before running into the adjacent room where it abruptly stopped, a gash that visitors were invited to walk through before it continued again, turning the corner and ending, unthread in front of Lozano's *Untitled*. To understand the composition of *Vanishing Point* it's best to imagine or look at the exhibition from above, as a series of lines that connect and break, that enclose and block, that hide and reveal.

Composition for Yael also means drawing on – literally – all elements of the exhibition space: the floor, the walls the ceiling, the space (or the body) of a room. Yael has often quoted chorographer Trisha Brown who said 'she felt sorry for the parts of the stage that weren't being used. It's perfectly good space. Why doesn't anyone use it?'[13] The compositions across the entire three dimensions of the gallery echoes Brown's call. The pole of *Cabinets with Noa Eshkol* extended through the glass ceiling of the second gallery, a line in space, a spine connecting floor and skylight, glass and concrete, from which hands sandwiched between glass protruded. Eshkol's two globes hung from the ceiling, their circular form echoing those in Af Klint's *Atom Series*.

Composition also implies abstractions that give form to ideas, lives and practices. brouwn's *Door Opening* (2005), an opening the artist created in the wall connecting two galleries based on his size for his 2005 exhibition, also

13 Sally Banes, *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-Modern Dance*, Middletown, CT: Weyslan University Press, 1987, p.81



Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, installation view with works by stanley brouwn and Andy Warhol, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, installation view with works from the Van Abbemuseum collection in *The School*, Van Abbemuseum, 2020

became an abstract composition, a transparent rectangle on the wall, the four sides that demarcated brouwn's ghost. Or we can think of the sequencing of rooms, of encounters, as composition. Beginning in the entrance hall where visitors encountered the rhythmic movements of children practising routines in a kibbutz as part of a Noa Eshkol workshop, walking around the Venetian blinds of General Idea's site-specific *Luxon V.B.* (1985) before encountering brouwn, Nauman and Moshé Feldenkrais in the museum's foyer. The composition hovered between epilogue, score and installation that unfolded throughout the galleries. To move from the mark making of Af Klint, Eshkol, Mohamedi and brouwn through *Door Opening* to *Jill and Freddy Dancing* projected unfussily on a wall before encountering the spatial *Vanishing Point* is to experience the movements and rhythms across the building.

Exhibition as Haunting

Loss, absence and memory permeated the spaces. I remember it as a haunting. The death mask of Lasker-Schüler mentioned above as part of *A Reading that Loves, A Physical Act*, the abstracted form of brouwn and *Opening*, the ghostly presence of Adrian Piper in the fourteen photographs of *Food for the Spirit* (1971) standing naked, barely discernibly photographing her reflection; The Five mediums, those who no longer occupy this world – Lozano, Mohamedi, Af Klint, brouwn, Lissitzky, Eshkol, Johnston, Warhol, Feldenkrais himself. The exhibition as space of haunting is also where these practices and relations are awakened, where we might think with the no-longer-there. To reinstall General Idea's *Luxon V.B*, chosen by Yael's long-time friend and collaborator

Grant Watson, in the entrance way awoke the ghosts of the New York collective. The mirrored blinds that serve as a permeable threshold is also a ghost of General Idea's 1985 exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum and of their lives and struggles as part of the AIDS awareness movement. Its open slats invite other ghosts to pass through. More poignantly perhaps, Mohamedi's daily practice of lines were haunted by the loss of her mother and her own illness that would ultimately take her life too early. This haunting was amplified by Yael's use of transparent and reflective surfaces that hovered in the galleries or leaned on walls. Markers of these lives appeared through glass, were reflected off metal, or emerged through the threads of *Vanishing Point*. Artworks, and the presence of practices and lives, appeared and dissolved, perceptible and then gone.

Exhibition as Prompt

To close I want to think of *A Daily Practice* as prompt. In the act of assembling, showing affinity, articulating, being a school, study, composing, disclosure and haunting, *A Daily Practice* took seriously the propositions of lives, works and histories being formed the creation and instituting of habits. Habits operate on different scales – they permeate institutional protocols, the rhythms and methods of artistic practice, and lives and relationships. Framing and disclosing made this exhibition a prompt, also for the museum to consider its own habits, movements and relations. It prompted The School's participants to think through their own patterns of movement. It was a prompt to visitors to think with and across practices, histories, lives and forms. Curator Elvira Dyangani Ose once eloquently described to me how she thought of exhibition

making as an instituting gesture – that within the space of the exhibition you institute practices, politics and protocols.[14] It remains a gesture as it is confined to the space and temporality of the exhibition. Thinking with Elvira, the exhibition is perhaps less a gesture and more of a prompt to engage the propositions held within the practices and the exhibition at large.

14 Elvira Dyangani Ose introduced this idea to me as a respondent in a PhD seminar at the University of Gothenburg in February 2021.