Rewinding Internationalism. An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary

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Abstract

'*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry into the Political Imaginary' investigates the *relationship between exhibition making, processes of inquiry and the political*. The project originates from, and takes place through, my own practice as a curator and aims to articulate how this relationship can be understood as mutually generative. It focuses on the affordances of exhibition making, its operations and processes; its spatial, formal and experiential possibilities. As these affordances, it is proposed, can both facilitate inquiry and engage the political, this project seeks to contribute to the relatively limited existing discourse in this area.

The broad terrain that these three related frameworks (exhibition, inquiry and the political) demarcate can be loosely understood as a discourse on the curatorial that has emerged since the 1990s in a globalised art system of exhibitions, institutions and biennials. The principal contours of these debates include early claims on the political through the epistemological processes of the curatorial as distinct from the 'practical tasks' of exhibition making, the development of the 'research exhibition' as genre, through to recent experiments in exhibition making that overtly resist representing ideology. Recently a renewed focus on the exhibition through both discursive registers and specific practices has broadly distinguished between the 'onto-epistemological' claims made for exhibition in more generalised terms from the detailed discussion of exhibition's practical 'field of operations'.

This project takes account of, and sits within, the context of these discussions and practices. It identifies an imbalance within the discourse whereby an overemphasis on the onto-epistemological does not take account of the numerous fields of operations of exhibition making: its strategies of analysis as well as its specific spatial, scenographic and experiential conditions. The central contribution of this project to the field lies in a proposed rebalancing of these two registers – the onto-epistemological and operational – when considering the relationship between exhibitions, processes of inquiry and the political. Through detailing an unfolding practice (specifically the realisation of the travelling museum exhibition *Rewinding Internationalism*) the project proposes a complex *interaction* between them, foregrounding how exhibition making enacts and instantiates a process of inquiry while engaging the political.

Keywords: exhibitions, the curatorial, the political imaginary, internationalism, the 1990s

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REWINDING INTERNATIONALISM

SCÈNES VAN DE JAREN 90 EN NU

SCENES FROM THE 1990S, TODAY

Als je op de terugspoelknop drukt en een deel van een lied of een scène in een film opnieuw afspeelt, dan gebeurt er iets tijdens dat proces. Het deel dat teruggespoeld is, wordt vervormd, uit zijn verband gehaald en anders ervaren.
Rewinding Internationalism gaat over ontwikkelingen, ideeën en verhalen uit de jaren 90. En over hoe deze doorwerken in de wereld van vandaag. Het einde van de Koude Oorlog, de AIDS pandemie en de toenemende globalisering zorgden voor enorme veranderingen, ook in de kunst. Wat is er gebeurd met de vragen en de ervaringen van toen? De tentoonstelling bevat beeld- en geluidsmateriaal van vroeger en van nu, archiefmateriaal en recent gemaakt werk.
De curatoren, collectieven en kunstenaars die de tentoonstelling hebben samengesteld, nodigen je uit 'terug te spoelen' naar momenten uit de jaren 90 en je daarop te bezinnen vanuit het perspectief van vandaag. Je kunt bij elk van de drie ingangen beginnen.

When you press the rewind button and replay part of a song or a scene in a film, something happens. The part that is rewound is distorted, taken out of context and experienced differently.
Rewinding Internationalism explores developments, ideas ... from the 1990s and their effect on the w... of the Cold War, the AIDS pandemic an... ization caused enormous changes, wi... eption. What happened to the que... ences of that time? The exhibition inclu... audio material from the past and pre... material and recently created work. ... lectives, and artists who curated ... u to 'rewind' to moments from ... m from today's perspective ... any of the three

Content

This research overview of '*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary' is one element within an aggregation of materials submitted for the doctoral exam.[1] The overview 1) summarises the research project, 2) guides the reader through the materials and their function within the project and 3) provides reflection and proposes questions for further research by way of bringing the project to a close. Included within the materials are three publications, two of which are relatively self-contained books that accompany iterations of the exhibition that is central to the inquiry, *Rewinding Internationalism* (2022 – 2023), and a third includes essays, interviews and editorials published or written during the project that are key to its development. There is also a body of digital documentation relating to the exhibitions accessible online.[2] Together, these materials disclose the research project and its contribution to the field of curatorial practice. This introduction indicates the role of these elements within the project. These materials are also referred to at different moments throughout the text, inviting the reader to move between the research overview and the different elements of the submission.

1 The informal term for this document within the Swedish PhD system is a 'kappa' or 'cape'. Its role is to 'wrap' or integrate the various material that comprises the submission.
2 This can be found at http://hdl.handle.net/2077/78835

Introduction and Narrative of the Project

Exhibition Making, Processes of Inquiry and the Political

The artist Brook Andrew visited the Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven in 2016, to develop a project as part of the Deviant Practice research programme that I had recently initiated as a curator at the museum.[1] His project would bring together the archives of the museum, and involve his collection of popular newspapers and magazines containing colonial stereotypes and his own work in sculpture, wall painting and collage largely inspired by his mixed Australian Celtic and Wiradjuri (Aboriginal Australian) heritage. Under the title *Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik*, a play on the phonetic spelling of 'iconoclastic', the clear and compelling proposal was to take apart and upend methods of categorising, presenting and mythologising 'icons' of art history prevalent in modernist institutions while highlighting linguistic violence perpetrated by settler-colonisers against indigenous communities.[2]

In discussing the form of the research, and those of other Deviant Practice researchers (through, for example, workshops, seminars and research papers), Andrew was clear that *Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik* must be an exhibition. Exhibition making was a way to actualise the dismantling of art historical categorisations by placing works in the museum's collection such as Gilbert and George's *Red Fists* (1980) on top of Andrew's Wiradjuri-inspired wall painting, or articulating the hierarchical relations between Pablo Picasso

and Wilfredo Lam by hanging the latter's *Le Marchand d'oiseaux* (1962) above the revered 'master's' *Buste de femme* (1943), itself rotated 90 degrees. It required the full set of exhibitionary operations to play out Andrew's research proposal – from negotiating with the conservation team to flip *Buste de femme* on its side and have Lam's painting peering over it, to understanding how visitors would manoeuvre around Andrew's giant inflatable sculpture *The weight of history, the mark of time (sphere)* (2015) that would hover centimetres off the ground and would physically obscure certain works while lighting up or casting shadow over others.

Andrew pieced together material, not as elements in a predefined, formulaic constellation, but as an enactment that demystified the collection in a heuristic, associative fashion. This approach pointed to a *relationship between exhibition making, processes of inquiry and the political* that drives this current project. Inquiring into this relationship is the central research task of '*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry into the Political Imaginary'. It originates from, and takes place within, my own practice and aims to articulate how the relationship between exhibition making, processes of inquiry and the political (with their different modalities and forms) can be understood as mutually generative. Specifically, it focuses on the affordances of exhibition making, its operations and processes; its spatial, formal and experiential possibilities. As these affordances, it is proposed, can both facilitate inquiry and engage the political, this project seeks to contribute to the relatively limited existing discourse in this area.

The broad terrain that these three related frameworks (exhibition, inquiry and the political) demarcate can be loosely understood as a discourse on the curatorial that has emerged since the 1990s in an increasingly globalised art system of exhibitions, institutions and biennials.[3] Some of the principal

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1   The Deviant Practice programme ran from 2016 – 19. It was structured around two tranches of grants given to artists, curators, archivists and educators (2016 – 17 and 2018 – 19). Based on an open call they were invited to make proposals to work with the Van Abbemuseum's archives, collection or context of Eindhoven. I conceived the programme and oversaw it, editing two publications that brought together the contributors' projects. Please visit https://vanabbemuseum.nl/nl/collectie-onderzoek/onderzoek/zoek-in-onderzoek/deviant-practice-2016-2017-2018-2019.

2   See Brook Andrew, 'Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik', in Nick Aikens (ed.), *Deviant Practice 2016 – 17*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2017, https://vanabbemuseum.nl/nl/collectie-onderzoek/onderzoek/zoek-in-onderzoek/deviant-practice-2016-2017-2018-2019/dev.pdf/@@download/file.

3   This "globalised" condition is not proposed here as a simple monolithic "new world order", but as a highly contested and multiple set of assymetric contexts and set of structures.

Brook Andrew: *Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik*, installation view with works by Brook Andrew, Yael Bartana, Gilbert and George and anonymous archival material, Van Abbemuseum, 2017

Brook Andrew: *Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik*, installation views with works by Douglas Gordon, Nilbar Güreş, Anselm Kiefer, Wilfredo Lam, Keith Piper, Pablo Picasso and anonymous archival material, Van Abbemuseum, 2017

contours of these debates include early claims on the political through the epistemological processes of the curatorial as distinct from the 'practical tasks' of exhibition making. Other key features are the development of the so-called 'research exhibition' as a genre, on through to recent experiments in exhibition making that overtly resist representing ideology.[4] As described in the chapter, 'Beyond Representing Ideology: The Exhibition, Research and the Political', there has been a renewed focus on the exhibition through both discursive registers and specific practices. This has broadly distinguished between the 'onto-epistemological' claims made for exhibition in more generalised terms from the detailed discussion of exhibition's practical 'field of operations', often approached through specific

4   These debates are the focus of the chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology' in this document. Discourse on the curatorial developed in the 2000s with the emergence of a number of graduate programmes. A specific discourse on the curatorial grew primarily out of European universities and publishers. A small selection of indicative texts and edited volumes includes: Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol: Intellect, 2007, 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; Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham, (ed.), *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, Massachusetts, MA: MIT, 2010; P. O'Neill (ed.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam: 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*, Moscow: Garage Publishing Program/Ad Marginem Press, 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: *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, 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 Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Documenta11: Platform 5*, Ostfildern-Ruit: 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 collection of essays *In a While or Two We Will Find the Tone: Essays and Proposals, Curatorial Concepts and Critiques*, Berlin: Archive Books, 2020.

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case studies.[5] This project takes account of, and sits within, the context of these discussions and practices. It is based on the recognition of an imbalance within the discourse whereby an overemphasis on the onto-epistemological does not take account of the numerous field of operations of exhibition making: its strategies of analysis as well as its specific spatial, scenographic and experiential conditions. The central contribution of this project to the field lies in a proposed rebalancing of these two registers – the onto-epistemological and operational – when considering the relationship between exhibitions, processes of inquiry and the political. Through the particularities of an unfolding practice (specifically the realisation of the major travelling museum exhibition *Rewinding Internationalism*) the project proposes a complex *interaction* between these registers, foregrounding how exhibition making enacts and instantiates a process of inquiry while engaging the political.

The project undertakes this rebalancing in multiple ways. Firstly, it identifies and deploys a number of analytical strategies (their operations and form) from different fields that might be useful in approaching research-exhibition practices. These are also introduced in the aforementioned chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology' and reappear in the subsequent chapters focusing on the exhibition project *Rewinding Internationalism.* Secondly, and principally, it works through the overlapping starting points, trajectories and physical instantiations of that long-term exhibition, which are the focus of two of the chapters in this document: '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations' and 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*'. The project's manifold *operations* propel the research process, wherein the space of the exhibition operates as a site both for analysis and evocation. Thirdly, the project undertakes this

rebalancing through the frame of the political imaginary, which is mapped in the chapter, 'The Political Imaginary as Heuristic Device' and mobilised in relation to the exhibition in the chapter 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*'.

In this project the political imaginary is used as (1) an object of study and (2) a means to negotiate the relationship between exhibition, research process and the political. The Political Imaginary is a construct in sociology, anthropology and political theory that increasingly circulates within the art system. The term's fluctuating use across a range of thinkers such as Cornelius Castoriadis, Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh, and Arjun Appadurai reveals the political imaginary as a malleable construct variously used to describe and analyse nationalism, orientalism, decoloniality and social processes within the context of globalisation.[6] Writers including Susan Buck-Morss and Marc Neocleous emphasise its *formal* nature, describing it as a 'terrain' or 'landscape' through which political actors, ideas and relations operate. Significantly they use it to map the shifting geopolitical context of the 1990s and the end of the Cold War, the temporal framing for *Rewinding Internationalism*. I turn to the different uses of the political imaginary – its capacity to analyse and evoke social relations, its relationship with signs and representation, and how it might be approached as a spatial 'landscape' to navigate the multiple, intersecting registers of exhibitions. As such, the project deploys the political imaginary as a device to consider how the operational and onto-epistemological registers of exhibitions inform one another, rather than being separate or demarcated.

5   See Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson (ed.), *PARSE*, no.13, *On the Question of Exhibition*, Part 2, summer 2021, https://parsejournal.com/article/editorial-4/.

6   The chapter 'The Political Imaginary' goes into the different uses by these thinkers. However, see Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, London: Polity Press, 1987 and Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983; Edward Said's notion of imagined geography is central to *Orientalism*, London: Panteon Books, 1978. See also Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh (ed.), *On Decoloniality*: *Concepts, Annaytics, Praxis*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018 and Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

While the use of the political imaginary draws on the work of different writers, its principal understanding in this project comes through the process of exhibition-making-as-inquiry. The research did not begin with the political imaginary as a concept to track and define. Indeed, the project picks up different theoretical constructions and methodologies at separate stages, beginning with the theory of articulation. The exhibitions generated within the project are not illustrations of different uses of the political imaginary. Rather, throughout the research process points of parallel between exhibition and the political imaginary are identified. Both the exhibition and the political imaginary operate as analytical devices *and* what Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar describes in relation to the imaginary, as propositions for 'world forming'.[7] It is the capacity to analyse while making a proposition of 'world forming' that offers a key point of intersection across exhibition making, research processes and the political imaginary. The characteristic of analysis-speculation is attributable to different literary or cinematic genres, such as the imagined worlds of Afrofuturism, for example, and its analysis of racialised capitalism.[8] What this project brings into focus are the particular affordances of exhibition making and the operational processes that carry this work and that I see as underdeveloped in accounts of the exhibitionary.[9]

Narrative and Components of the Project

This section provides a summary account of the research project from its beginnings in autumn 2018

7   Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 'Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction', *Public Culture*, vol.14, no.1, December 2002, 1–19.996.

8   I am thinking particularly of the writing of Octavia E. Butler and her *Xenogeneis* (1997) and *Lilith's Brood* (2000) series.

9   There has been a renewed focus on exhibitions within curatorial discourse. This has tended to focus on 'exhibitonary apparatuses' or 'ideological infrastructures' in more generalised and often abstracted terms. See for example Tristan Garcia and Vincent Normand (eds.), *Theatre Garden Bestiary. A Materiaoist History of Exhibitions*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019. Even if a section of the publication is given over to 'The Exhibition From' there is little detailed discussions of specific spatial practices and operations within particular exhibitions.

to its conclusion in summer 2023. It has comprised a number of research actions – conference presentations, conference organising, publishing, editorial projects and, most importantly, exhibition making. Essays and interviews related to these different actions appear in the material in the submission and offer the reader different lenses into the project. Through the following short narrative account, I introduce and itemize these various components.

Articulation

The project began under the title 'Articulation, the curatorial and decolonising the institution'. It was initially conceived as an attempt to see how theories of articulation, as developed in cultural theory by Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Jennifer Daryl Slack and others, could be applied to the expanded sense of the curatorial.[10] Over the course of the first year, the project was reframed under the title 'Practice-led research into the concepts of nationalisms and internationalism operative in political imaginaries in sites within the art system. The 1990s and the present'. This infelicitous and lengthy title in itself signals the difficult process of respecifying the research project. The reorientation of the research project in this first year moved from (1) an attempt to apply a theoretical matrix (articulation) to curatorial practice (within a stated ideological project, that of decolonising the institution) to (2) being a practice-led project (in contrast to applying a theory to practice) with a clearly defined thematic (nationalisms and internationalisms) and a specific historical frame (the 1990s).

10   'Theories of Articulation' is the focus of the essay 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations' in the submission where you can find references to a number of texts. However an excellent summary of the theories of articulation and its importance to cultural studies is given by Jennifer Daryl Slack in her essay, '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.

A first step in the reformulation was deciding to drop the reference to 'decolonising the institution' and to focus instead on the relationship between theories of articulation and the curatorial, recognising there was a conceptual or ideological knot between theories of articulation on the one hand and decolonial positions on the other.[11] To place two theoretical/ideological positions in dialogue, the research project would have had to resolve the relationship between them, giving substantial space to the intellectual and political genealogies of cultural and decolonial studies and how this related to the field of museum studies. While vast in its scope, this took the project away from the fields of contemporary art and curatorial practice, my principal areas of interest and expertise. The aim at this stage was for the practice – both artistic and curatorial – to lead the research process and not to have a subordinated practice deployed in the service of theory.

Significantly contributing to the re-specification of the research task was the writing of the paper 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations', which appears as the first item in the portfolio of material for the doctoral exam submission. This unpublished paper maps out the broad contours of the two fields, probing possible parallels and overlaps between them, as well as their respective differences. The text synthesises writing on theories of articulation by some key proponents: Ernesto Laclau, Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Jennifer Daryl Slack and others. It outlines the generative nature of this theoretical resource and its emergence within cultural studies. The text looks at

articulation as a methodology through which to conduct a study. In this document and elsewhere in the submission I identify shared characteristics with articulation methodology and approaches to research-exhibition practices. Turning to 'the curatorial' I focus on how the term was developed and understood as distinct from – or in 'excess of' – exhibition making, particularly by a group of practitioners associated with the Curatorial/Knowledge department at Goldsmiths, University of London.[12] Within this discourse, the curatorial is foregrounded as a trajectory of knowledge formation. In other words, the claims on the political made in the name of the curatorial rest upon its epistemological possibilities, rather than being aligned with an ideology or political cause. I contrast this with theories of articulation that arise out of an analysis of Thatcherism and have their roots in Western Marxism (although a central contribution is in their challenge to the reductionism of Marxist thinking).[13] In relation to the overall research task, the paper shows how theories of articulation and the curatorial have a shared approach to theorising whereby theory is 'picked up' or contingently elaborated, rather than simply applied, while each seeks to 'intervene' in an area of study rather than to resolve it conclusively.

The paper also argues that theories of articulation and the curatorial differ significantly in their contexts of emergence. The former comes out of the context of Thatcherite Britain, emerging as a methodology developed by a group of thinkers working through a crisis in Marxist thought and seeking to analyse the 'Great Moving Right Show'; the latter developed as a means to understand or explicate a field of activity situated between the academy and the professionalised world

11   Namely, if decolonial practice is premised on the notion of 'de-linking' modernity and coloniality, theories of articulation is premised on the notion of forging connections or linkages (as outlined in my essay 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations') between concepts and practices. The decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo outlines the premise of delinking most clearly in 'Roads the Future', in Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011, 27 – 74.

12   Much of the ideas developed by early participants in the Curatorial/Knowledge programme are brought together in J. – P. Martinon (ed.), *The Curatorial*, 2013.
13   See, for example, 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.

of institutions, exhibitions and the art market.[14] Although initially central, articulation has receded in the reformulation of the research project goals. Nonetheless this text is important in developing my initial understanding of the curatorial, through a limited, though significant, number of practionners: the relationship between the discourse's epistemological claims and the exhibition on the one hand, and the curatorial's claims on the political on the other. Lastly, the text highlights how both present themselves as transdisciplinary fields of activity. Theories of articulation – its insistence on creating a 'momentary unitary', the notion of the conjunctural and the wider foregrounding of context within cultural studies – continue to inform my understanding of the affordances of exhibition making.[15]

The focus on theories of articulation is part of a larger engagement with cultural studies through the long-term exhibition and publishing project *The Place Is Here*, which includes four exhibitions I curated in the Netherlands and the UK in 2016 – 17,[16] and which culminated in a publication in 2019. As described in

what follows on '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations', the focus and methodology of this exhibition was formative for the research project. In the essay, 'A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1980s', I reflect on the relationship between exhibition making, the curatorial and theories of articulation. The essay for the accompanying publication *The Place Is Here: The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*, co-edited with Elizabeth Robles is included in the submission along with the book's introduction.[17] The closing section of 'A Complex Unity' draws on theories of articulation in relation to the operations of exhibition making. Central to this is understanding articulation as both theory and practice, as an analytical device and methodology for what cultural theorists would name the 'mapping of the context'.[18] The theoretical-practice based nature of articulation, the essay suggests, has parallels with exhibition making, as instantiated by the example of *The Place Is Here*.

Arriving at articulation through Hall, a key figure for many of the artists in *The Place Is Here* and their explorations of race and nation within the conjuncture of 1980s Britain, theories of articulation are part of diagnosing and working through a cultural-political moment. Yet while these theories and their 'strategic, political and cultural' inflections allow a reading of 'exhibition as articulation' in *The Place Is Here*, that project was unable to accommodate questions of form, space and the scenographic – which are so central to the operations and affordances of exhibition making. In this respect, articulation – also understood as a form of expressing – remained a discursive proposition within the inquiry.

As detailed in the chapter '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations', *The Place Is Here* is significant to the understanding

14 Stuart Hall coined the term the Great Moving Right Show in his eponymous essay where he also introduced the term 'Thatcherism' to describe the policies of Margaret Thatcher, then leader of the Conservative opposition party in the UK, a year before she was elected Prime Minister. See Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', in Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwarz (ed.), *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017.

15 References to articulation appear in a number of texts I have subsequently written, for example: 'A Daily Practice: An Exhibition As …' in the submission and part of Nick Aikens, Jeroen Boomgaard, Yael Davids, Linda van Deursen and Nadia Schneider Willen (ed.), *I Am Going to Be Your Last Teacher: A Workbook*, Amsterdam: Roma Publishing with the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Zurich, Gerrit Rietveld Academie, Amsterdam and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 2023. The decision to analyse the 1990s in *Rewinding Internationalism*, through multiple perspectives and contexts evidences a conjunctural approach.

16 *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 Badovinac, Teresa Grandas, Merve Elveren and Fefa Vila Núñez, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 16 April – 25 September 2016

17 Nick Aikens and Elizabeth Robles, ed., *The Place Is Here: The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019.

18 Jennifer Daryl Slack, 'The Theories 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, 125.

The Place is Here, installation view with works by Martina Attillle, Zarina Bhimji, Ingrid Pollard, Marlene Smith, and 'The Making Histories Visible' archive, Nottingham Contemporary, 2017

of the affordances of exhibition making, writing and publishing in relation to a given topic that is operative in this research project. The work done there on the 1980s could be extended to the context of the 1990s, while recognising the limitations and problematics of working through the framing of nation and race.[19] Significantly, the 1990s became the focus of the multi-year programme 'Our Many Europes' for the European museum confederation, L'Internationale, of which the Van Abbemuseum is a founding partner and within which I have worked extensively. This placed the research within the context of an international museum network and made it possible to develop a major exhibition as part of the project.

Exhibition as Site of Research

Under the formulation 'Practice-led research into the concepts of nationalisms and internationalism operative in political imaginaries in sites within the art system. The 1990s and the present' the inquiry turned to a specific moment (the 1990s) and thematic: nationalisms and internationalisms. The initial exploration and its relevance today were developed in the collaborative conference 'Considering Monoculture' in February 2020 in Brussels with M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp and the cultural organisation Flemish-Dutch House deBuren.[20] Here, the research project looked at instances of artistic/ institutional practice from the 1990s and today. While this naming of the research task specified it as being manifested or investigated through practice ('practice-led'), it was framed as a research project *about* a topic with a view to presenting some form of findings through making an exhibition. However, by the midpoint of the doctoral process it was reframed under the current title '*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary', and the exhibition as research output moved from an ancillary element or simple output to becoming the central site and agent of the inquiry. The exhibition as site of research, the naming of research within existing accounts of the curatorial and exhibition practice and formulating more concrete language related to research-exhibition strategies had come to occupy an increasingly substantial part of the project. Key to this was the development of a two-day conference 'Transmitting, Documenting, Narrating: Performance Practice and the Exhibition as Sites of Research' (October 2020) with performer Nathalie Suck that included close readings of research-exhibition practices with curators including Kristina Khouri and Rasha Salti, Nataša Petrešin Bachelez and Bojana Pikšur, and art historian Anthony Gardner. The keynote lecture was given by curator and researcher Irit Rogoff, a key figure in the development on discourse on the 'curatorial' and its epistemological claims.
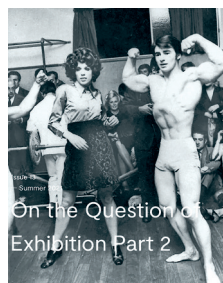
19   Central to problematising questions of 'nation' and 'race' as put forward in cultural studies was my engagement with the writing of Denise Ferreira da Silva in her book *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, and in particular her critique of what she describes as CRES (the critical field of racial and ethnic studies, which she sees as being ushered in by Michael Omi and Howard Winant's *Racial Formation in the United States*, 1986). I describe this shift in chapter two, '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations'. Da Silva summarises her position in the introduction, which is worth quoting at length: she describes how 'the authors define racial formation as the "social historical" process through which racial categories and racial meanings are constantly produced and challenged in ongoing political struggle about how society should be organized ruled and represented.' She goes on: For them, race is a principle of social configuration, a social signifier, a symbolic construct that identifies certain conditions as 'racial formations'. My point is this: if racial difference precedes race, the sociohistorical concept, either it is an empirical reference (as constructed by quantative analysts) or it is tied to another signifier. Even as they attempt to avoid it, Omi and Winant construct racial difference as a substantive bodily trait, an empirical (as opposed to material) referent of social signification. Thus in repeating the ethically correct gesture, that is, in denying race any biological (scientific) soundness, they fail to demonstrate why racial difference, which is already an appropriation of the human body in scientific signification, should constitute a central dimension of social representation. In other words, Da Silva identifies and problematises how CRES (and by extension a project such as *The Place Is Here*) have reinscribed racial difference even as it has sought to (rightly) undermine any scientific grounds for race by focusing on social and cultural context. Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Toward a Global Idea of Race*, London and Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2007, xxv – xxvi.

20   The programme for this conference is in the digital appendix.

Concurrent with these activities was co-editing the three-part issue of *PARSE* journal under the title 'On the Question of Exhibition' (with co-editors Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson). Included in the portfolio of materials in the exam submission are the editorial introductions that I co-authored with my colleagues. The issue brought together a range of current voices and perspectives as supplementary literature review, or review in practice for the PhD project. In conversations with curators and researchers, a certain inability, or unwillingness, to describe the operations of exhibition making in relation to processes of inquiry revealed itself. In the issue exhibitions were interrogated through multiple frameworks – from embodiment of modern-colonial infrastructures to exhibitions as taxonomic and ordering devices. However, an unquestioned 'givenness' about the act of exhibiting was often evident in the contributions.[21]

In the editorial of the second part of the issue, two exhibition registers were identified: 'the world-making and ordering techniques of exhibition – what we might broadly call its *onto-epistemological register*' and 'the pragmatic and technical questions of exhibitionary apparatuses, or its *operational register*'. The constellation of essays from academics, curators and curator-artists was not intended to create a dichotomy between these two fields 'but rather to set up a field of tension and interference between different moments of production-analysis'.[22] As the research project developed, the identification of these two registers became key to its conceptualisation. Discourse on the exhibition, particularly as it pertains to processes of inquiry and the political, has over emphasised the onto-epistemological register. In working through the specifics of exhibition practice, this project makes a claim for a rebalancing, understanding how the processes and operations of exhi-
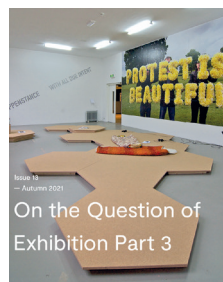
Issue 13
— Spring 2021

On the Question of
Exhibition Part 1

Issue 13
— Summer

On the Question of
Exhibition Part 2

Issue 13
— Autumn 2021

On the Question of
Exhibition Part 3

Past Disquiet Narratives and Ghosts from The International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978, installation view, MACBA Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Barcelona, 2015

bitions intersect and inform an exhibition's capacity to produce knowledge, as well as being central to its status and self-understanding as *exhibition*.

In co-editing *PARSE* I published an interview with three contributors to the 'Transmitting, Documenting, Narrating' event, also included in the submission.[23] In this text the exhibitions *Past Disquiet – Narratives and Ghosts from the International Art Exhibition for Palestine, 1978* (2015) curated by Kristine Khouri and Rasha Salti and *NIRIN*, 22nd Biennial of Sydney (2020) curated by Brook Andrew are discussed with Gardner, Khouri and Salti. These projects show two markedly different approaches. The first was part of a decade-long research project into the history of the International Art Exhibition for Palestine held in 1978, in Beirut, while the second was a proposition arriving out of the specificity of the Australian biennial structure and echoes much of Andrew's approach in *Ahy-kon-uh-klas-tik* in confronting histories of colonialism and their legacies in institutional structures. Zooming in on specific displays and strategies across the two exhibitions, the conversation aims at understanding how the form and process of exhibition making impacts the respective research of the curators, such as Khouri and Salti's use of interviews to locate themselves in the research process, or posters, graphics and deprioritising artworks in the exhibition to focus on solidarity.

During a walk-through of *MONOCULTURE – A Recent History* with its curator Nav Haq, included in the submission, different elements of this large scale research exhibition are discussed. I ask Haq about the relationship between the form and its research across twentieth-century world history, agriculture and philosophical thinking. Haq's central premise for his project is based upon the philosopher Else Frenkel-Brunswik's

21   See the introduction to Part 1 of N. Aikens, K. Caminha, J. Mistry and M. Wilson (ed.), *On the Question of Exhibition*, HDK Valand, 2021.
22   See editorial in *ibid.*, https://parsejournal.com/article/editorial-4/.

23   'On *Past Disquiet* and *Nirin*: A Conversation between Rasha Salti, Nick Aikens, Kristine Khouri and Anthony Gardner', *On the Question of Exhibition Part 1*, *PARSE*, no.13, spring 2021, https://parsejournal.com/article/on-past-disquiet-and-nirin/.

'ambiguity thesis', broadly asserting that an increased tolerance of ambiguity is tied to the tolerance of difference in society. Monoculture – from the history of eugenics and nationalist socialism, emancipatory movements like Negritude and even the discourse on identity politics arriving in the 1990s – are positioned (somewhat contentiously) as unambiguous, fostering categorical division. The conversation looks at how Haq negotiates this thesis through the groupings of works, display devices to demarcate areas of 'ambiguity' as opposed to the relative 'monoculture' of the white cube, and by relating to theory through setting first edition books into walls as 'artefacts'.

Many of the observations from working on *PARSE*, 'Transmitting, Documenting, Narrating', and the conversation with Haq, alongside a broader account of an understanding of the relationship between research practices and the exhibition (across both discourse and exhibition practice) feature in the essay 'Approaching Research Exhibition Practice', published in *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination* in February 2021 and the next essay in the submission.[24] The text brings together avenues within the inquiry that are revisited and expanded on in the chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology'. It also identifies strategies or methodologies for research-exhibition practices that are invested in the political. Microhistories, as developed in social anthropology, conjunctural analysis from cultural studies, the use of 'critical fabulations' coined by social historian Saidiya Hartman and that of 'potential history' by theorist and artist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay are all put forward as possibilities for how to approach research-exhibition practices as well as speculating on future strategies. At the close of this text, the need for a more detailed consideration of architectural, scenographic and material contours of exhibition-research

Monoculutre – A Recent History, installation view with *Simone de Beauvoir, Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté (The Ethics of Ambiguity)*, (1947), M HKA, 2020 – 21

practices is noted, an intention that is subsequently taken through in the exhibition projects discussed in what follows.

Exhibition Practice

In parallel with writing, editing and convening conferences, my work as a Van Abbemuseum curator across exhibition projects directly and indirectly advanced the research project. For example, supervising the research project *A Daily Practice* (2016 – 20) by the artist and performer Yael Davids was formative in thinking through exhibitions from multiple perspectives. Her project, that uses the somatic techniques of Feldenkrais to experience artworks in the museum's collection, developed into an exhibition in 2020 that combined the artist's works, those from the collection and on loan, with a functional Feldenkrais school in the centre of the actual exhibition. The essay, 'A Daily Practice: An Exhibition As ...' in the submission and publication *I Am Going to Be Your Last Teacher: A Workbook* (2023) produced after the project, is a close reading of the show and constellation of frames through which to consider exhibitions.[25] The relationship to the exhibition is opened up as a site where modes of discursive engagement and the operational coexist, generatively informing one another: formal composition, the assembly of voices and stories, the exhibition as bodily, spatial encounter, etc. This essay contributes to the research task by mapping the nexus of exhibition, research processes and the political in intersecting the aforementioned onto-epistemological and operational registers across purely formal (exhibition as composition) and far more propositional (exhibition as prompt) aspects. The essay underscores the need, within the project, to work through practice: the wider observations and suggestions of thinking

24   The essay appears in Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson (ed.), *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, issue of *Vector – critical research in context*, Iaşi, Romania and Gothenburg: Artes and ArtMonitor (University of Gothenburg), 2022, 96 – 103.

25   See N. Aikens, J. Boomgaard, Y. Davids, L. van Deursen and N. Schneider Willen (ed.) *I Am Going to Be Your Last Teacher*.

Yael Davids: A Daily Practice, Feldenkrais lesson with works from the collection, The school,
Van Abbemuseum, September 2020

through exhibitions happen in tandem with close readings of rooms, sequencing of galleries and working processes with collaborators.

Following through on some of these considerations, in 2020, the exhibition project *Rewinding Internationalism* began and is included in the submission as two publications and a digital folder of documentation, and is the focus of the chapters '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations' and 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*'. The exhibition with a preliminary iteration at Netwerk Aalst (opening February 2022), followed by expanded versions at the Van Abbemuseum (opening November 2022) and the Villa Arson, Nice (opening June 2023) constitutes a substantial part of the research project. Its development and realisation in tandem with writing, editing and convening, renders the exhibition not an outcome, demonstration, or representation of discursive activities but as informing the project's central claim to rebalance the onto-epistemological and operational register through which exhibitions are understood. The exhibition project had begun with a desire to explore the construct of internationalism and navigate its historical resonance in the history of twentieth-century emancipatory struggles. Within the frame of L'Internationale, and the context of a contemporary moment where the politics of division (within and outside Europe) are pervasive, questions included: How might the Van Abbemuseum's position within a museum network aligning itself with the history of internationalist, socialist struggle, be a site to explore the meaning of this term from a contemporary perspective? How might the process and form of exhibition making drive this? The form of the exhibition, including the processes of deciding content, structure and form, offered the chance to work through, in practice, the relationship between exhibition making, the curatorial and its claims on the political.

The chapter '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations' describes the different

genealogies and trajectories of the project. Its departure point is the 1990s, the focus of the 'Our Many Europes' programme – a decade when the notion, or horizon of internationalism and its resonances with emancipatory political projects dissipated with the ascendancy of globalisation and the rise of ethno-nationalisms across Europe.[26] At the same time responding to and coming out of these processes, the art system in the 1990s looked to a form of New Internationalism, eschewing the hegemony of Europe and the United States and embracing a global circuit of biennials and mega exhibitions that foregrounded anticolonial and postcolonial discourse.[27] Working with colleagues in the confederation, commissioning artworks that moved between the 1990s and today, drawing on a selection of loans that spanned the 1970s to the present, and working through the aesthetic-spatial-temporal conditions of exhibition making became the means through which to navigate internationalism – as construct and proposition. In doing so, the exhibition project developed into a *process* of research whereby the epistemological and the operational intersected and informed one another. Through its method of commissioning, working with different collaborators and emphasising the role of scenography, the operations of exhibition making manifested different readings of, and approaches to, internationalism. If the exhibition project had begun to investigate internationalism (from the context of the confederation and the art system) though acknowledging the opacity of the term, it was through the process of exhibition making that new insights were garnered, namely understanding internationalism itself as a political imaginary.

26   For a summary of the 'Our Many Europes' programme see
     https://www.internationaleonline.org/programmes/.
27   New Internationalism was a term introduced at the conference
     'Global Vision: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts' held
     at the Tate Gallery in London in 1994, and, as I discuss in '*Rewinding
     Internationalism*: Processes and Operations', was one departure point
     for the exhibition project. See Jean Fisher (ed.) *Global Visions: Towards
     a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, London: Karla Press, 1995,
     which includes many of the contributions from the conference.

The first iteration of the project took place in Netwerk Aalst, a kunsthalle in Belgium, whose extended exhibition guide is the third publication in the submission, and approaches the exhibition as a form of rehearsal for the larger iterations to come. The scripts and scores that appear across the show formally instantiate a try-out of ideas. The exhibition includes new commissions by susan pui san lok/lok pui san (*REWIND/REPLAY*, 2022) and Didem Pekün (*Disturbed Earth*, 2022), alongside a two-monitor video work from the 1990s and filmed in Aalst by Wendelien van Oldenborgh (*Horizontal*, 1997). Next to this are collaborative projects in process developed with L'Internationale colleagues and other international researchers shown on 'research boards': four freestanding structures with a constellation of reproductions of archival material and artworks.[28] Within the context of the research project, the exhibition is a site to assemble and work through positions, where knowledge, and alliances materialise – a strategy for navigating the relationship across exhibition, research processes and the political that emphasises process rather than proclaiming outcomes.

The version of the exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, ten months after Aalst, includes over thirty-five artists and collectives, five new commissions and the realisation of four collaborative research projects across one-thousand square metres. Putting aside differences in scale, budget and audience numbers, the most significant change between these two versions is the use of scenography and display. Working with theatre scenographer Natascha Leonie Simons since January 2022 was transformative in the process of exhibition making and involved: preliminary

28   These included 'The Three Ecologies and Internationalis Feminisms'
     developed with Paulina Varas; 'Keepers of the Waters' (Chengdu and
     Lhasa, 1995 – 1996)' developed with Sebastian Cichocki; 'Contemporary
     Art of the Non-Aligned Countries: Unity in Diversity in Contemporary
     Art (Jakarta, 1995)', developed with Bojana Piškur, Grace Samboh and
     Rachel Surijata; and 'ADN (Association pour la Démocratie á Nice),
     Carnavals Independents and Les Diables Bleus (1991 – 2004)'.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with *REWIND/REPLY* by susan pui san lok/lok pui san, (2022), Netwerk Aalst, 2022

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Belkis Ayón Manso, Nadiah Bamadhaj, Ivan Kožarić, Semsar Siahaan and various archival materials, Van Abbemuseum, 2022–23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Betsy Damon and research boards, Netwerk Aalst, 2022

workshops on content to arrive at scenographic principles and map sequences of rooms, lighting and sound; lengthy sessions with artists, external researchers and collaborators on display; working closely with the technical team on materials, structures and lighting; and consulting mediators to alter standard visitor routes through the galleries. It was through this spatial, formal, often highly technical work that the project made the largest advance in understanding the affordances of exhibitions in relation to an evolving idea of the political imaginary. This practice reaffirms the observation in the 'Transmitting/Documenting/Narrating' conference that there is too little emphasis placed on questions of display and scenography in relation to research-exhibition practices, overlooking how exhibitions engage with the political beyond simply representing ideology. An understanding of how exhibitions operate in a space between experience and reference, narrative and evocation grew out of this exchange, and how that can move around and in between representation. Indeed, as the process went on it was precisely these affordances that generated an understanding of both the frame of the project – internationalism – and a wider reflection on how exhibitions produce meaning, discussed towards the end of this text.

The fourth and final publication in the submission is the book accompanying the Van Abbemuseum exhibition, and includes: my essay as a close reading of the show, and a reflection on the term internationalism with Sara Buraya Boned; artists Pekün and pui san lok on 'circling of the archive' in their new commissions; a reading of a single work, Allan Sekula's *Waiting for Teargas* (1999 – 2000) by researcher and educator Pablo Martínez; and composing a presentation as research process with curators Bojana Pikšur, Grace Samboh and Rachel Surijata. Each contribution accesses the nexus of exhibitions, research processes and the political from distinct standpoints: single artworks, curatorial processes or institutional politics. My own text touches on each while foregrounding the

exhibition's textures, sounds and moods, sequencing of rooms, use of light and sound bleed, and scenographic principles that attempt to give material and spatial form to the exhibition's intangible ideas.

The essay also introduces the political imaginary by scanning its trajectory in anthropology and sociology – expanded on in the chapter 'The Political Imaginary as Heuristic Device' of this document – to propose internationalism as imaginary, and the exhibition as one way to understand, access and transmit imaginaries. While not used at the beginning, the introduction of the political imaginary into the project at a relatively early stage, was due to an encounter with its use in earlier engagements with nationalism, specifically Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and its critique by figures such as Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar and Partha Chatterjee.[29] Equally, the concept of 'imagined geographies' in Edward Said's proposition of 'Orientalism' seems central to understanding how the West had produced a vision of the Orient and cast it as other.[30] The initial engagement with the imaginary through the framework of nation, race and postcolonial discourse has circulated within the art system with different degrees of precision. The essay volume *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, within which the essay 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices' appears, highlights its increasing prominence in relation to contemporary art and exhibitionary discourse.[31] A more detailed understanding of the term 'imaginary', its genealogy in sociology by Cornelius Castoriadis, Charles Taylor, Arjun Appadurai, Susan Buck-Morss and others, is produced at the latter stages of the project.

This narrative account (and the sequencing of elements in the submission) details how the processes

29 See D. P. Gaonkar, 'Towards New Imaginaries: An Introduction', and Partha Chatterjee 'Whose Imagined Community?', in Gopal Balakrishnan (ed.), *Mapping the Nation*, London: Verso, 2012, 214 – 25.
30 Said introduces Imaginative Geography in E. Said, 'Imaginative Geography and Its Representations: Orientalizing the Oriental in Orientalism', *Orientalism*, 49 – 72.
31 *Ibid.*

of exhibition making was running parallel to a mapping of a theoretical construct. These parallel and subsequently intersecting processes are reflected in two pieces of work: (1) '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Political Imaginaries at Work', within the exhibition publication and that appears in the submission and; (2) 'Notes on Political Imaginaries and Exhibitions', a seminar paper developed for the seminar series 'Transmission in Motion' at Utrecht University.[32] The Chapter 'Political Imaginary' extends the ideas that I initially explore in the essay and seminar. The chapter 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*' provides key insights from the research trajectory: (1) that the processes of developing *Rewinding Internationalism* produce an understating of internationalism as a form of political imaginary, space of possibility and projection rather than a concrete set of principles of accepted history and (2) that the process of exhibition making and insistence on the scenographic as tool to explore meaning through evocation, relation and affect, creates new understandings of the political imaginary – as an elusive construct, a scaffolding of theory and references rather than something robust and assured – in spatial and experiential form. These insights bolster the main claims of the project, which, as I have stated, calls for rebalancing in considering the onto-epistemological and operational registers of exhibitions as they pertain to processes of inquiry and the political.

Introduction to the Chapters

The four chapters of the document are modular, and do not need to be read sequentially. Indeed, much like

the exhibitionary logic of *Rewinding Internationalism*, by reading them out of order different meanings and relations are hopefully generated while maintaining the central orientation of the inquiry. For example, beginning with a close reading of *Rewinding Internationalism* and then moving to the contextual debates in chapter one offers different insights from starting with a mapping of the field and then progressing to exhibition operations and processes.

'Beyond Representing Ideology' places this inquiry within the context of debates on the exhibition, research processes and the political as played out within discourse on the curatorial, and wider debates on artistic research. It situates this project as part of a renewed focus on the exhibitionary that nevertheless identifies what I see as a gap in describing the field of operations within exhibition making.

'*Rewinding Internationalism:* Operations and Processes' frames the exhibition project, its starting points, operational processes and realisation in the wake of its third iteration. The aim here is to detail the working through of the research task *in* practice, and to name the operations and formal, spatial decisions that informed the process. Particular emphasis is given to scenography, as it developed in relation to the Van Abbemuseum iteration, and in collaboration with scenographer Natascha Leonie Simons.

'The Political Imaginary as Heuristic Device' introduces the political imaginary as a concept to navigate the relationship between the exhibition, research processes and political. As a heuristic device, rather than fully resolved theoretical framework, uses of the imaginary in anthropology, sociology and political theory, specifically in understanding the imaginaries of the 'state' and 'nation', are considered. Attention is drawn to writers and concepts, including Said's 'Imaginative Geography', not included in recently established genealogies of the term. The section closes with how the political imaginary has been picked up in the art system, situating this

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Jean-Claude Boyer, Lubaina Himid, Norbert van Onna, Magda Starwaska Bevan, Xavier Vaugien/Fimotec-Nice, Villa Arson, 2023

exhibition in dialogue with other practitioners including Simon Sheikh.

'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*' is a walk-through that explores how the exhibition, constructs of internationalism and the political imaginary interface and lend meaning to one another. The ways in which the research-exhibition process has generated an understanding of the political imaginary as an analytical-evocative proposition that itself offers a way to read internationalism is detailed. This chapter attempts to describe a series of knots whereby the research-exhibition process of making *Rewinding Internationalism* creates insights into the frame of the project, internationalism and the process of the inquiry. The political imaginary, as device and proposition, is used to negotiate, or move between the exhibition, processes of research and the political.

Stuart Hall describes his analyses or interventions in a particular discourse as moments of 'arbitrary closure' whereby observations and conclusions come together in a constellation. However, these constellations are not set *for all time* but ready to be opened up, expanded on and reconfigured as the conjuncture changes and the analysis needs to adapt.[33] Leaning on Hall's notion of arbitrary closure by way of concluding this text, in which multiple actions and processes in the text have been revisited – including the current iteration of *Rewinding Internationalism* on display in the Villa Arson Nice at the time of writing – emphasises this inquiry as analysis-in-process and certainly an analysis-through-practice. Through understanding, proposing and articulating a position worked through and 'on the move', this text takes place in the dynamics of a given political conjuncture, but more significantly, perhaps, through the shifting contours of curatorial practice itself.

Beyond Representing Ideology: The Exhibition, Research and the Political

33   Stuart Hall 'Cultural Studies and its Theoretical Legacies' in Lwrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson and Paula Trechler (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, New York: Routledge, 1992, 280.

This chapter maps the terrain of the inquiry – the relationship between exhibition, processes of research and the political. In situating the research project as a contribution to discourse within the field of the curatorial and how others have navigated this relationship discursively and practically, it identifies how the understanding of strategies of analysis in research-exhbirion practices remains under-developed. Examples are introduced from other disciplines, while recognising the limitations of transferring these strategies to exhibitions. In the subsequent chapters, the processes and operations engaged in the research project are described, along with a treatment of the political imaginary, to note the overlap and intersections among these terrains at different moments of the project. The chapter is structured in three sections. The first two look at questions of representation and abstraction in relation to the epistemic politics of the curatorial and exhibitions, while the third looks to forms of historical analysis from other fields and how they might be used to approach research exhibition practices beyond representing ideology.

The chapter modifies and builds on positions in other parts of the submission. This is done most noticeably in the published essay 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices', where the deprioritising of the exhibition in discourse on the curatorial is identified as having contributed to an underdeveloped understanding with respect to the exhibition in relation to research practices. The project, however, foregrounds exhibition and nonrepresentational strategies within contemporary art's epistemic politics.

Questions of representation and performativity inform an understanding of the type of knowledge-work that can occur within exhibitions, where something is not announced, nor fully resolved, but rather comes into being through its very exhibiting. These are key questions for discourse on the curatorial and its epistemic politics. Questions of representation also underpin an approach to exhibitions that acknowledges

their role in, what Ariella Aïsha Azoulay calls, the 'imperial technologies' of the museum that tie the exhibitionary to colonial systems of classification and which serve to fix subjects of address.[1] Pushing back against the representational drive of the exhibition accounts for, if not quite overcomes, these technologies. Much of this chapter, therefore, is occupied with how practices across the exhibition, research and the political function beyond representation.

Both conscious of the need to avoid generalised claims on 'exhibition', 'research' and the 'political', and mindful that this project takes place through the concrete unfolding of an exhibition practice, this chapter introduces the project's registers of abstraction: first, in moving from the specificity of a given exhibition project to general pronouncements on *the* exhibition;[2] second, as nonrepresentational strategy within exhibition projects, from use of the sonic and non-figurative to space and the scenographic; third, as evoked in the movement between concrete instances and theoretical constructions in respect to articulation and the political imaginary.[3]

In the last section parallels are proposed between the exhibition construed as a form of production-analysis, able to resist forms of representation, and other forms of historical analysis in political science and sociology.[4] Conjunctural analysis, micro-

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1 See Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*, London: Verso, 2019.
2 This back and forth between specificity and generalised pronouncements is a distinct strategy in the essay 'A Daily Practice: An Exhibition As…', included in the submission, which moves between a close reading and broader reflections on the exhibition 'as' Assembly, Composition, Prompt, etc.
3 This is not to suggest the imaginary is put forward as something abstract. Indeed, as I go on to discuss, its cogency as a concept lies in its complex relationship to both representation and the social.
4 This section of the document builds on 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices' that appears in the submission. While some repetition across the two texts occurs, it felt important to include some of the central points and assertions in that text – namely the identification of forms of historical analysis that would allow a way of describing approaches to research exhibitions, within this main overview. Many of the references that appear in that essay are used in this chapter.

histories, critical fabulations and 'potential history' are noted as ways to think through different modes of analysis and adaptations of form (from data to more literary, essayistic approaches) in exhibitions. Articulating this to understand the field of operations of exhibition making as connected to its onto-epistemological claims, or the dual registers of exhibition, as arrived at in the introduction to the second edition of the *PARSE* journal I co-edited, titled *On the Question of Exhibition*,[5] lays the ground for the remainder of the document in order to approach the processes of *Rewinding Internationalism* and engage political imaginaries.

The Question of Representation and Epistemic Politics

The question of representation – how something is shown and described – surfaces throughout the research project.[6] The project's emphasis on representation derives from a wish to identify a more nuanced, complex relationship between research, the political and its instantiation in an exhibition beyond a simple mechanism whereby a political position can be 'read', an idea may be seen to be 'illustrated', or a political ideology represented by an artwork or a selection of archival material. It arises from acknowledging that the process of exhibition making is not a declaration of fully formed, resolved knowledge. Rather, in constellating and composing artworks and contexts – and through the specific visual, sonic and spatial affordances of the exhibition – something is both disclosed and comes into view that is often not known in advance of its realisation. To only use representation,

illustration or declaration within the exhibition process is to stifle the possibilities of that process.[7]

The pushback against representation is a common thread in curatorial discourse, and its claims on the political since it emerged in the early 2000s. In earlier formulations on the 'curatorial' it was adopted to position itself as an epistemological proposition, as opposed to the 'practical tasks' of exhibition making.[8] The curatorial as 'an event of knowledge' as Irit Rogoff describes it, eschews representation as it takes place as a 'trajectory of activity' that is less concerned with 'showing things' than with the very activity of producing knowledge.[9] In this move away from the exhibition and its perceived reliance on representation, towards an

5   Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson (ed.), *PARSE*, no.13, *On the Question of Exhibition*, Part 2, summer 2021, https://parsejournal.com/article/editorial-4/.
6   It first appeared during my 50 per cent seminar, whose respondents were the curator Elvira Dyangani Ose and the artist-researcher Jyoti Mistry where the question or form of exhibition was centred. We discussed in the seminar how exhibitions function beyond representing that which they were addressing and fulfilled multiple roles – as spaces of epistemic possibility, or what Dyangani Ose described as an 'instituting gesture'.

7   I remember clearly, during the process of realising *Rewinding Internationalism* at the Van Abbemuseum, describing to people that I was excited to see the exhibition and 'what it means' to have all this work and these contexts together. In other words, the exhibition's meaning was not known to me before the fact of its physical realisation and spatialisation.
8   I trace the contours of this position in much greater detail in the text 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations' and again in 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices'. However, see, for example, Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial', in B. von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski (ed.), *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012; Sarah Pierce, 'The Simple Operator', in Jean-Paul Martinon (ed.) *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013, 99; Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung, 'On est ensemble. Ça va waka. A Few reflections on navigating the Xenopolis', in Nora Sternfeld (ed.), *CuMMA Papers*, no. 22, Helsinki: Aalto University, 2017; Doreen Mende, 'Exhibiting as a Displaying Practice, or, Curatorial Politics', in Milica Tomić and Dubravka Sekulić (ed.), *GAM.14 Exhibiting Matters*, Berlin: Jovis and TU GRAZ, 2018. This position is stated most clearly in an early conversation between Rogoff, co-founder of the influential Curatorial/Knowledge programme at Goldsmith's, University of London and academic Von Bismarck, who has subsequently edited numerous volumes on curatorial practice. In the conversation, which I identify in 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial', Rogoff, offers detailed descriptions of the curatorial, and 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). For Rogoff curating operates within the field of representation. In contrast, the curatorial is a 'trajectory of activity' and an 'epistemic structure'. She says: '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.' I. Rogoff and B. von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial', 21.
9   Ibid.

epistemic activity, the curatorial makes its claims on the political, or as Sarah Pierce defines it, its 'political engagement, as it connects to knowledge production in ways that are neither good nor bad but are unpredictable and difficult to manage'.[10] It does this by adopting a particular relationship to theory, specifically the non-formal knowledge of post-structuralism that resists the concrete, the representational and the systemic. Discourse on the curatorial foregrounds the relationship between epistemological inquiry with the political. In fact these two are folded together so that the political rests in the epistemic possibility of the curatorial.

I approach the political claims of the curatorial as an 'epistemic activity', both as a proposition divorced from a specific context and in relation to the emergence of the discourse itself with caution.[11] I agree with curator and art historian Yaiza Hernández Velázquez, who is mindful of a 'philosophy of the curatorial' that is at risk 'of becoming theoretically abstract, of falling into a theoreticism that functions in advance of a problem, leaving any politics in abeyance while putting 'discourse first'.[12] Rather than discounting the 'epistemic politics' of the curatorial and its deprioritising of the exhibition, this project seeks to reconfigure these claims within a rebalancing of how exhibitions are understood, both through onto-epistemological and operational registers.

The move to deprioritise the exhibition and focus on the epistemic politics of the curatorial, is part of a

wider shift within contemporary art practices that have foregrounded research or 'knowledge-based' work. In his book *Knowledge Beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics*, Tom Holert offers a wide-ranging account of this 'turn'. Citing thinkers from the philosopher Ivan Illich to prominent decolonial thinker Walter Mignolo, Holert situates epistemology as the ground that connects economy, politics and sexuality. In this central, or foundational role, epistemology or working with knowledge is positioned as inherently political. Holert proceeds to track different ways in which knowledge emerges, is negotiated or critiqued within contemporary art practices: the use of the archive, the trajectory and current pervasiveness of 'artistic research' as well as identifying how so-called knowledge production – a term that appears in the art system in the early 2000s with figures such as Sarat Maharaj but that traces back to 'economic jargon of the 1950s and 1960s educational and research policies' – is entwined with a dematerialised, neoliberal economy.[13] Despite his wariness Holert highlights examples of art's epistemic politics pushing back against the institutional structures within which it takes place, through what Marina Vishmidt terms 'infrastructural critique'.[14] Similarly, Holert identifies a host of artistic, pedagogi-

10   S. Pierce, 'The Simple Operator', 99. This essay appears in the volume *The Curatorial: The Philosophy of Curating*, which I cite extensively in 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial' is an aggregation of contributions form participants in the Curatorial/Knowledge programme. Its very title, a 'philosophy' of curating, reveals the shift in emphasis away from exhibition making to a 'thinking' activity.

11   Discourse on the curatorial was constructed by practitioners in the field. Writing as part of an emerging field there is an inevitable element of self-legitimisation and validation that was required, to secure funding for postgraduate courses, for example, as well as the necessary task of mapping the discipline for those involved. However, given that this mapping took place from within the discipline itself I am cautious of its claims.

12   Yaiza Hernández Velázquez, 'Imagining Curatorial practice After 1972', in Paul O'Neill, Simon Sheikh, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson (ed.), *Curating After the Global: Roadmaps for the Present*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, CCS Bard and Luma Foundation, 2019, 261.

13   See, for example, Sarat Maharaj, 'Know-How and No-How: Stopgap Notes on "Method" in Visual Art asKnolwedge Production', *Art and Research*, no. 2. See also, Florian Dombois, Claudia Mareis, Ute Meta Bauer and Michael Schwab (ed.), *Intellectual Birdhouse, Artistic Practice as Research*, London: Koenig Books, 2012; Henk Bordgoff and Michael Schwab (ed.), *The Exposition of Artistic Research: Publishing Art in Academia*, Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2012. Tom Holert provides an extensive summary and bibliographic references for these debates in *Knowledge Beside Itself: Contemporary Art's Epistemic Politics*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2020, 63 – 83, 70. Holert's exhaustive analysis and set of references are formative for this project, such as those relating to 'artistic research', *ibid.*, 82 – 84. My own inquiry takes place within the trajectory Holert lays out – it is a PhD in artistic practice, with elements of the submission published through recently formed platforms for artistic research, such as *PARSE* and *Vector*.

14   Marina Vishmidt, 'Beneath the Atelier, the Desert: Critique, Institutional and Infrastructural', in Maria Hlavajova and Tom Holert (ed.), *Marion von Osten: Once We Were Artists (A BAK Critical Reader in Artists' Practice)*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2017, 218 – 35. Indeed, it builds on what he describes as 'hard won battles' within the academy that have positioned artistic research as part of – not outside, or as an exception to – wider research practices.

cal and curatorial practices whereby knowledge is the subject, rather than the object of inquiry.[15]

The question of representation in relation to research-exhibition practices and their engagement with the political underpins related questions of authorship – what curator Anselm Franke describes as the 'positivism problem' in relation to presenting – adopting a universalising position that underpins Western claims on knowledge, and its inverse, how the nonrepresentational creates space for different subjectivities and knowledge to operate.[16] In describing the work of Tony Cokes, whose thirty-minute film *Microhaus or the Black Atlantic?* (2006 – 08) appears in *Rewinding Internationalism*, theorist and artist Denise Ferreira da Silva writes saliently about the work of artists and academics invested in 'exposing and countering … representational mechanisms'. These mechanisms she says, are 'deployed by state capital and the tool of racial knowledge, which are deployed to secure it as "common sense" in support of deadly needs'.[17] The questions and mechanisms of representation have been crucial in how race, the racial and 'racial knowledge' have been approached by a range of critical race theorists.[18]

15   This describes my own project, which is is aimed at contributing to a discourse on the relationship between research and the exhibition. As a subject, this knowledge is both what Holert describes as 'self-directed' (reflecting on itself) and 'outward-directed', through the framework of internationalism and the 1990s, or the various contexts included in the research-exhibition projects. T. Holert, *Knowledge Beside Itself*, 15. Such a distinction is helpful in understanding the different ways in which the epistemic is engaged in the project.

16   See Anselm Franke, 'Notes on the Research-Based Exhibition: Dialectical Optics and the Problems of Positivism', in *GAM.14*. Franke's description of the essay exhibition and the resistance to positivist announcements that illustrate research is also worth noting. See, for example, Anselm Franke, 'Exhibitions as Research', lecture, *Between the DISCURSIVE and the IMMERSIVE*, Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Humlebæk, Denmark, 3rd December 2015.

17   Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'The Already Known', in Natasha Hoare (ed.), *Tony Cokes: It UR Reading This It's 2 Late: Vol. 1 – 3*, London: Goldsmiths Press, 2019, 119.

18   Critical Race Theory developed in the 1990s in the US with key thinkers including Derrick Bell, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic and Kimbelé Williams Crenshaw (who coined the term 'intersectionality'). For an introductory overview see Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (ed.), *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed, New York: New York University Press, 2019.

Da Silva's position, however, goes further than resisting the politics of representation that underpin identity politics in the 1990s.[19] In looking to work beyond representation through, in the case of Cokes, the eschewing of the archive (or the image at large) in favour of a minimal pairing of the sonic with text, there is the possibility to work past, or before what she describes as the 'already known'. Crucially, it affords the chance to sidestep a universalising 'I'. By transmitting something that does not have a clear signifier, where x corresponds to y, other knowledges and subjectivities can emerge, which, for Da Silva, means the possibility to resist 'the tool of racial knowledge'.[20] She expands on this in her description of 'knowing at the limits of justice', which she states 'must start before, but facing the beyond of representation'.[21] Practices that function past representation point to a set of possibilities for knowing that are not fixed, declarative and secure, as has been the case with the main tenets of modern knowledge, which she traces back to Descartes.[22] At the same time, they mobilise the epistemic politics of artistic practice as a political tool that counters the violence of universalising knowledge.

The question of representation, across the form of the exhibition itself – its modes of producing knowledge and the institution – emphasises what Azoulay terms the 'imperial technologies' of the museum.[23] For Azoulay, their processes of collecting (or looting) objects, classifying, codifying and then 'representing' cultures is part of a violent imperial process that needs to be 'unlearned'.[24] For researcher Catalina Imizcoz the question of representation

19   See, for example, Stuart Hall, Jessica Evans and Sean Nixon (ed.), *Representation*, London: Sage Publications and Open University Press, 1997.

20   *Ibid*, 116.

21   Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'To Be Announced: Radical Praxis or Knowing (at) the Limits of Justice', *Social Text*, vol. 31, no. 1 (114), spring 2013, 44.

22   *Ibid.*

23   See A. A. Azoulay, *Potential History*.

24   See *ibid*. The notion of unlearning is the focus of chapter one, 'Unlearning Imperialism', 1 – 57.

They have always sat uneasily alongside the strategic choices forced on black movements and individuals embedded in national political cultures and nation states in America, the Caribbean, and Europe."

Tony Cokes, *Microhaus or the Black Atlantic?*, 2006 – 08, installation view, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

within the 'exhibitionary form' is directly tied to the modern-colonial paradigm with the exhibition as a microcosm of the colonial project, as manifest in, for example, the Great Exhibition in Crystal Palace (1851).[25] Curator Patrick D. Flores describes the 'medium of representation' at play in some exhibition practices as 'bear(ing) the weight of its colonial origins'.[26] Yet if Imizcoz sees the exhibition as a microcosm of the colonial project, she also suggests that microcosm might be the means through which to bring other knowledges into being, with the nonrepresentational serving as a strategy to do so.[27]

Holert's identifying of the 'epistemic politics' of contemporary art, the use of nonrepresentational strategies as a means to counter universalising knowledge and 'unlearning' the representational characteristics of 'imperial technologies' are not mutually exclusive domains. Back in 2002, for his contribution to the catalogue of the landmark documenta11, Maharaj argued for the type of knowledge work that took place in visual arts as 'at odds', rather than being 'at one with the high speed, imperial sweep of knowledge systems such as philosophy, science, social theory'.[28] He saw it less a 'replicator' than a 'shredder-pulper of readymade theory', with the kind of

Mona Hatoum,
Homebound,
2000, presentation
at Documenta11,
Fridericianum, in 2002

'feel-think-know antenna it throws up ... quite different from discursive modalities'. Prefiguring Da Silva's advocacy of the 'beyond of representation', Maharaj writes that these 'modalities enable both "other" ways of knowing and ways of knowing "otherness", what he calls '"xeno-equipment", rigged out for attracting, conducting, taking on difference'.[29] In Maharaj's intervention there is a coming together of the epistemic politics of nonrepresentational models of 'feel-think-knowing' and its capacity to allow 'other ways of knowing' to emerge – that in documenta11 was the political project of decentring European and US epistemologies and positions. This double pushback against representation, was a recurring device in *Rewinding Internationalism*. The use of abstraction (in the non-representational sense described above)**,** in the work of Cokes, the paintings of Lubaina Himid and the accompanying sound work of Magda Stawarska-Beavan, or the sonic script of pui san lok serve as clear strategies to circumvent prescribed forms of 'racial knowledge'. In the case of pui san lok's radical reworking of the Gate Foundation archive,[30] this also means a resistance to the 'imperial technologies' of the archive itself. Within the physical choreography of the exhibition, as we shall see in 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*', they operate precisely as spaces of 'not-knowing' that both resist a simple 'reading' of the exhibition and the conjuncture of the 1990s, while offering different forms of sensorial and cognitive

25 Catalin Imizcoz, 'The Modern Paradigm: The Exhibitionary Form and Our Epistemological Crisis', in *On the Question of Exhibition*, Part 2; Patrick D. Flores, 'The Exhibition Problematic and the Asian Dislocal', in Biljana Ciric (ed.), *From a History of Exhibitions towards a Future of Exhibition Making: China and Southeast Asia*, Berlin: Sternberg, 2020, 335.

26 The wish to work 'beyond representing ideology' contains a tacit acknowledgement of the modern-colonial technologies, conditions and infrastructures of the museum and the exhibitionary form within which my inquiry takes place, hence my caution with some 'decolonising' claims of exhibitions. The relationship between representation, classification and the modern-colonial paradigm was the subject of Anselm Franke's long-term project *Animism* (2010 – 14), which I discuss in 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices'. See also Anselm Franke, 'Animism: Notes on an Exhibition', *e-flux journal*, no.36, July 2012, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/36/61258/animism-notes-on-an-exhibition/.

27 This came out specifically in a conversation I had with Imizcoz when she visited *Rewinding Internationalism* at the Van Abbemuseum in March 2023.

28 Sarat Maharaj, 'Xeno-Epistemics: 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-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002, 72.

29 *Ibid.*

30 The Gate Foundation archive was established in 1988 in Amsterdam to foreground artists from Asia for a Dutch public. The founding director is Els van der Plas. The Gate Foundation Archive moved to the Van Abbemuseum in 2006 after its closure due to funding cuts. In 2016 susan pui san lok/lok pui san begaun a research project on the archive within the Deviant Practice research programme. See pui san lok, 'Through the Gate/an(g)archivery', in Nick Aikens (ed.), *Deviant Practice*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2017, https://vanabbemuseum.nl/nl/collectie-onderzoek/onderzoek/zoek-in-onderzoek/deviant-practice-2016-2017-2018-2019/dev.pdf/@@download/file. See also 'Circling the Archive: Didem Pekün and susan pui san lok/lok pui san in Conversation with Nick Aikens', in Nick Aikens (ed.), *Rewinding Internationalism*, Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2023.

experience. They also drive the use of scenography to evoke, rather than to illustrate, ideas or relations.

Documenta11 marks a significant shift in the relationship between the exhibition, processes of research and the political that has, in many respects, subsequently shaped discourse on research, the curatorial and its epistemic politics.[31] Okwui Enwezor, the project's artistic director, argued that the epistemic and political proposition of the project could not be contained within the 'optics' and 'temporality' of the exhibition itself and that there was both a 'spatial and temporal' as well as 'historical and cultural' nature to what was being proposed. Enwezor asserted that the exhibition did not signal the outcome or endpoint of the preceding four platforms, but was rather part of an open trajectory that did not offer a 'form of closure'.[32] He 'placed its quest within the epistemological difficulty that marks all attempts to forge one common, universal conception and interpretation of artistic and cultural modernity'.[33] Yet in claiming the exhibition as part – and the not the sole arbiter – of an epistemo-political project, the specificities of the framing, methodology and spatiality of the exhibition itself was left largely unaddressed. The exhibition was simply deemed unable or insufficient in holding the full extent of the proposal. And while Maharaj touches on the scrambling between 'reason' and 'intuition' at play in the exhibition, offering different ways to describe and relate to the sorts of knowledge work that took place, like much subsequent work in this area, it falls short of working through this relationship on an operational level or through concrete examples.

31   See Anthony Gardner and Charles Green, 'Post-North? Documenta11 and the Challenges of the "Global" Exhibition', in Nanne Buurman and Dorothee Richter (ed.) *Documenta: Curating the History of the Present*, special issue, *On Curating*, no. 33, June 2017, https://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateiverwaltung/issue-33/pdf/Oncurating_Issue33.pdf, 109 – 20.

32   Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box', in *Documenta11_Platform 5*, Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002, 42.

33   *Ibid.*, 43.

The Question of Abstraction and Epistemic Politics

In the essay 'Approaching Research – Exhibition practices', the work of curators including Vesić, Ndikung, Salti and Khouri are noted as a few practitioners among many who in recent years use the exhibition as a space to process and develop research, with the 'research exhibition' as genre of sorts.[34] Within the folder of texts, two interviews – one with Salti, Khouri and Gardner, and a second with Haq, look in detail at their exhibition research methods.[35] Within this diverse field, the exhibition is less a research output as understood in an orthodox academic setting, or what Holert would describe as the exhibition as research 'object'.[36] Instead, the exhibition is positioned as a 'research process', one stage in a sequence of

34   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 Jelena Vesić, 'Post-Research Notes: (Re)search for the True Self-Managed Art', in Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (ed.), *Curating Research*, Amsterdam: Open Editions and De Appel, 2015. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung founded S A V V Y Contemporary in Berlin with the express 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, http://moussemagazine.it/the-globalized-museum-bonaventure-soh-bejeng-ndikung-documenta-14-2017/; 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 (ed.), *Past Disquiet: Artists, International Solidarity and Museums in Exile*, Warsaw: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw, 2018.

35   See 'On "Past Disquiet" and "NIRIN": A Conversation between Rasha Salti, Nick Aikens, Kristine Khouri and Anthony Gardner, *On the Question of Exhibition, Part 1* and Nick Aikens and Nav Haq, 'A Walk-Through the Exhibition "MONOCULTURE: A Recent History" at M HKA (Antwerp)', *L'Internationale Online*, 11 February 2021, 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.

36   Though limited in its focus within the UK context, the following is an instructive example of the difficulty of treating exhibitions as a conventional research output. See Kristina Niederer, Michael Biggs and M. Ferris, 'The Research Exhibition: Context Interpretation and Knowledge Creation', 2006 Design Research Society, International Conference in Lisbon, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/241439944_The_Research_Exhibition_context_interpretation_and_knowledge_creation.

actions.[37] Within the expanding discourse on how research or the epistemological is described, vocabularies and strategies have been named, many of which appear in the *PARSE* publication *On the Question of Exhibition'*.[38] In his contribution, Joshua Simon describes the exhibition as a 'cosmogram' that offers a 'way to organise meaning', a form of 'conceptual map' through which research/knowledge is transmitted.[39] Elsewhere, Anselm Franke's self-described 'essay exhibition' points to a methodology to describe exhibition practices where ideas are 'tried out', rather than declared, or fully formed, pushing back against what he sees as the 'positivism' problem of research-as-exhibition.[40] Or Doreen Mende foregrounds 'spatiality' as 'a concept to give shelter for the network of nonrepresentational research that displaces while remaining aware, entangled and inevitably attached to the power of display.'[41]

In *On the Question of Exhibition* the type of practices put forward by Mende, Franke, Simon and others are invested in the 'onto-epistemological register' of exhibitions. The difficulty with this form of discursive positioning is that in naming the move beyond representation and describing practices invested in the epistemic, a level of abstraction is introduced that often obscures what is addressed or taking place. The anti-representational drive becomes a cypher to describe exhibitions and research in generalised terms. This produces a lack of specificity and a form of self-reflexivity that simply carries over Hernández Velázquez's critique of the 'philosophy of curating' into broader pronouncements on exhibitions.[42] Simply put, claims on the political get lost in abstraction. The task seems to be to hold onto the space of the non-representational, the space that allows the 'not yet known' to speak and be felt that is similarly articulated to the specific and the concrete. This, as Da Silva makes clear, entails not simply a case of allowing the epistemic to take place, but rather creates spaces for other types of knowledges, not founded on a universal I, to emerge. Foregrounding the epistemic and the nonrepresentational creates the possibility for a dynamic relationship with ideas, theory and non-formal knowledge that needn't be side-lined from the exhibition (as was the case with the earlier focus of the curatorial deprioritising of the exhibition) but can take place through its field of operations. By problematising the question of representation *within* exhibitions (and by identifying the specific means through which to do that), rather than insisting on displacing the exhibition altogether, the relationship between research, or the epistemic more widely, and the political, come into relation. Furthermore, it is through the operations of the exhibition, its framing and methodology (historiographic as well as spatial and formal) that the abstract, or the non-representational can be aligned with specific contexts (in the case of this project the construct of internationalism and conjuncture of the 1990s). The political is not limited to an epistemological process – but is bolstered as it works through, rather than being 'in abeyance', of a problem.[43]

Returning to a starting point of the inquiry, principles of articulation open up a way to think through the knot of the 'beyond of representation' and how it pertains to engaging the concrete. In *Politics*

37   The idea of exhibition as research process is introduced by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson in 'An Opening to Curatorial Enquiry: Introduction to Curating and Research', in *Curating Research*, 11–23.

38   Within Part 1 of the issue, Samia Henni approaches 'Exhibition as a Form of Writing', Saul Mercadent looks at 'Editing an Exhibition', and Kathrin Böhm, Yolande Zola Zoli van der Heide, Gavin Wade, Mick Wilson and Franciska Zólyom discuss the exhibition as 'pile' in relation to Böhm's practice.

39   Joshua Simon, 'Exhibition as Cosmogram', in *On the Question of Exhibition, Part 2.*

40   See the conversation between Anselm Franke and Juan Canela 'An "Undisciplined" Form of Knowledge: Anselm Franke', *Mousse Magazine*, 12 May 2017.

41   See Doreen Mende, 'Endlessly form the Middle, Or, Toward Curatorial/Politics', *On the Question of Exhibition, Part 3*, no.13, autumn 2021, https://parsejournal.com/article/endlessly-from-the-middle-or-towards-curatorial-politics/.

42   For an in-depth and at time humorous discussion on exhibitions performing politics, see Nav Haq and Tirdad Zolghadr, 'A General sort of adversity to the aboutness of things', in Pascal Gielen and Nav Haq (ed.), *The Aesthetics of Ambiguity: Understanding and Addressing Ambiguity*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2020.

43   Hernández Velázquez, 'Imagining Curatorial Practice After 1972', 261.

and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism – Fascism – Populism Argentinian political theorist Ernesto Laclau asks that we question connotative or evocative links between discourses and customs and instead think how concepts are linked to political realities.[44] He uses the example of political theory, which he remarks is not inherently grounded in class struggle. Rather it is how a theory is picked up and articulated to a particular set of actions that gives it its meaning. Similarly, in his landmark text 'The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees', Stuart Hall reminds us that 'ideas and concepts do not occur, in language or thought, in that single, isolated, way with their content and reference irremovably fixed'. The 'cogency' of language he writes, 'depends on the "logics" which connect one proposition to another in a chain of connected meanings'.[45] These 'chains', or what would later be identified as 'articulations', are not fixed but are constantly moving, depending on how they are being connected and who is picking them up. As discussed in the paper 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial', this allows the concept of 'nationalism' to be mobilised in the guise of vastly different political projects because it is articulated with different social realities and causes, whether that be a project of emancipatory self-determination or one of ethno-nationalisms. Within the context of this inquiry the question is how the nonrepresentational, the epistemic politics of the 'not yet known' might be articulated or mobilised to the concrete in a way that they can 'face the world' to use Irit Rogoff's term. How might we understand a relationship between the nonrep-

resentational qualities of certain artistic and exhibition practices (that mobilise the sonic and the spatial, for example) as interfacing – enacting this articulation?[46]

The point here is not to draw equivalence between 'abstract' forms (the spatial and the sonic) with levels of abstraction in 'ideas' and 'theory', but it is a move to start bringing the two into some form of relation. By starting to think them together, the hope is to develop vocabularies that describe how exhibition practices work through ideas *and* form and their relationship to a specific context or set of contexts.

Strategies of Historical Analysis

In this section I turn to different uses of historical analysis to see how questions of ideas and form – the theoretical and the concrete – are engaged, and how they might help in approaching research exhibition practices. Thinking with cultural studies and theories of articulation is helpful, precisely because among the foundational projects in that area is working through the 'problem' of ideology. This entails understanding how one moment or register (in the case of Marx, the economic) does not unilaterally determine everything but rather dynamic mediations and linkages are reciprocally operating across different moments and of the 'social formation'.[47] Yet, in a wider sense, theories of articulation

44   I expand on this point in-depth in 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations' that quotes at greater length from the section in which Laclau writes: '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 ideology? Considered in itself it has no class connotation. The latter only derives from its specific articulation with other ideological elements.' Ernesto Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism – Fascism – Populism*, London: NLP, 1977, 7.

45   Stuart Hall, 'The Problem of Ideology: Marxism without Guarantees', *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, 25 – 46, 40.

46   In 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices', I cite the use of the dual exploration and sonic in the exhibition *Force Times Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies* – the 2020 – 24 edition of Sonsbeek in Arnhem across multiple venues curated by Ndikung et al. – that delves into the 'intercourse between labour and the sonic. In the essay I write 'What interests me about *Force Times 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'. N. Aikens, 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices'.

47   Again, this is dealt with in 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial'. Of note are formative texts in the development of this essay, specifically, in overcoming the reductionism in Marxist thought, 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, 18.

provides an instructive example of a field of practice that is engaging the epistemic. Crucially, it has been doing this both internally – defining its own field of operations, its own relationship to the epistemic – and externally, by analysing the shift to the right in the UK in the 1970s, readings of popular culture, etc. One area were this project aims to contribute to the discourse on exhibitions, and its relationship to both research processes and the political, is in centring the 'the field of operations' of exhibition practices both analytically and formally.

Expanding on a reading of historical analysis within exhibition practices to understand research strategies in relation to histories, figures or contexts, this document turns to the specifics of my own exhibition-inquiry's interface with the formal and spatial. 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices' began to identify different modes and forms of analysis. These included bringing together disparate social, political and cultural material in relation to 1980s Turkey in the exhibition *How Did We Get Here* (SALT Istanbul, 2016), curated by Merve Elveren. Through conjunctural analysis, as used in cultural studies, 'context' is repositioned as the focus of study in an exhibition, not the background from which an object of study emerges.[48]

Taking these ideas further, and thinking through exhibition practices as conjunctural analysis, offers a way to read the bringing together of multiple types of material related to a specific moment. For example, *How Did We Get Here* operates like a cultural study that works through theories of articulation, treating Turkey in the 1980s as a 'complex unity', to use Louis Althusser's phrase, within which different elements are 'related as much through their difference as through their similarities'.[49] It spans recordings of the Eurovision song contest, the activities of the militant Radical Democrats or documentaries on the building of the second Bosporus bridge and the satirical political-cultural magazine *Sokak*,[50] structured over three floors with no chronology of thematic groupings. *How Did We Get Here* is not trying to tell a single narrative of 1980s Turkey, but is rather an exercise in 'mapping the context', an analysis that primarily uses existing archival and documentary material from popular culture. Conjunctural analysis insists on an analysis being contingent, non-declarative or fixed 'for all time', that a reading of something needs to change and adapt as different forces change.[51] This approach is used in *Rewinding Internationalism* – an analysis of a specific conjuncture that speaks to the 'certain conditions' of today while tacitly accepting that these conditions shift and move.

Another form of historical analysis cited here is the microhistory, developed in Italian scholarship and most famously by Carlo Ginzburg to work through a specific story, or set of events as emblematic of a moment. 'Approaching Research – Exhibition

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48   Conjunctural analysis, a hallmark of cultural studies, is derived from Marxism and taken on by researchers such as Lawrence Grossberg, Jennifer Daryl Slack and Stuart Hall, to name a few. It aims to assess how different intersecting forces – political, cultural and economic – come to bear on a historical moment. 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 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. 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. Conjunctural analysis is perhaps best exemplified in a key early work of cultural studies: Stuart Hall, Chas Critcher, Tony Jefferson, John Clarke and Brian Roberts, *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order*, London: MacMillan, 1978.

49   S. Hall, 'Race, Articulation and Societies Structured in Dominance', 35.
50   A number of these microhistories, including the Radical Democrats and *Sokak* were included in Nick Aikens, Teresa Grandes, Nav Haq, Beatriz Herráez and Nataša Petrešin-Bachelez (ed.), *The Long 1980s – Constellations of Art, Politics, and Identities: A Collection of Microhistories*, Amsterdam: Valiz, 2018.
51   For an excellent take on conjunctural analysis see also John Clarke, 'Doing the Dirty Work: The Challenges of Conjunctural Analysis', in Julian Henriques and David Morley (ed.), *Stuart Hall: Conversations, Projects and Legacies*, Goldsmiths Press, 2018, https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/19747/1/Stuart%20Hall_OA_version.pdf, 57–63.

How did we get here, installatiuon view with SOKAK, SALT, 2015

Practices' looks at filmmaker Hira Nabi's detailed portrait of the Gadani ship-breaking yard in Baluchistan in her recent film *All that Perishes at the Edge of Land* (2020), shown as part of *Force Times Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies*, the 2020–24 edition of Sonsbeek in Arnhem as an example of a microhistory.[52] In *Rewinding Internationalism*, Allan Sekula's *Waiting for Teargas (white globe to black)* (1999–2000), shows images of protesters on the streets of Seattle during the anti-globalisation protests as a lens through' which to address a wider history – of the ascendancy of globalisation and resistance to those shifts. In contrast to conjunctural analysis, microhistories offer a literary approach, where questions of form are central to the analysis, as was the case with the anti-documentary approach of Sekula, analysed by Pablo Martínez in the publication accompanying *Rewinding Internationalism*.[53] The story of the miller Menocchio accused of heresy during the Inquisition in Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* (1976) is a work of literary description, as much as it is an analysis of counter-reformation, sixteenth-century Italy.[54] Recently the microhistory has been considered to look at a range of artistic research practices, including photography and cinema – not to transfer

Hira Nabi, *All that Perishes at the Edge of Land* (film still), 2020

it directly onto other disciplines, but to consider how artistic research combines historical analysis with literary or essayistic approaches within the genre of the microhistory.[55]

Critical fabulation, as formulated by historian Saidiya Hartman is a methodology for thinking through how exhibitions approach but work in excess of the archive or the historical record, and is even more explicitly indebted to a literary form and something discussed by Gardner in our conversation as part of 'On the Question of Exhibition'.[56] While microhistory can also deploy narrative, the pairing of a 'critical' approach with the construction of a 'fabulation', something commonly associated with fiction writing, describes a multitude of practices whose work is situated in the gaps in the archive, that use fiction to fill those gaps with the magical realism of a 'fabulation', but that do so to 'critical' ends.[57] Azoulay's proposition of 'Potential History', shares similarities with critical fabulations, where she imagines history not 'as what it really was', but 'what it might have been'.[58] The companion proposition to her call to 'unlearn imperialism', 'potential history' is nevertheless a more open proposition than Hartman's literary term, not associated with a form or genre. It too has been used to describe or align a number of artistic, curatorial and research practices, including Azoulay's own exhibitions and artistic

52 As I write in 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices': Hira Nabi's recent, and compelling, film *All That Perishes at the Edge of Land* (2020), shown at *Force Times Distance*, focuses on the daily lives and the stories of labourers on the Gadani ship-breaking yard in Baluchistan, 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. See also Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung et. al (ed.), *Force Time Distance: On Labour and Its Sonic Ecologies*, Berlin: Archive Books, 2021, 25.

53 Pablo Martínez, 'Waiting for Teargas: Images between the Power if the Many and the Violence of the Police State', in *Rewinding Internationalism*, 57–64.

54 Andre Slávik expands on this in his essay 'Microhistory and Cinematic Experience: Two or Three Things I know About Carlo Ginzburg', in Magnus Bärtås and Andrej Slávik (ed.), Stockholm: Konstfack, 2016, 38–67.

55 *Ibid.*

56 In the conversation Gardner describes the need for artists and curators to have 'a kind of imaginative engagement with these histories'. He says: '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.' See 'On *Past Disquiet* and *NIRIN*'.

57 In *Rewinding Internationalism* this approach to the archive is evident in the work of Didem Pekün and susan pui san lok/lok pui san explicitly, which they discuss in their conversation. Artistic practices such as those of the Atlas Group or Akram Zatari are indicative of critical and fictional approaches to archives. More recently one can look to the project *Imaginary Archives* by Kiraṇ Kumār, Kiwi Menrath and Laurie Young, published by K Verlag, 2022.

58 A. A. Azoulay, *Potential History*.
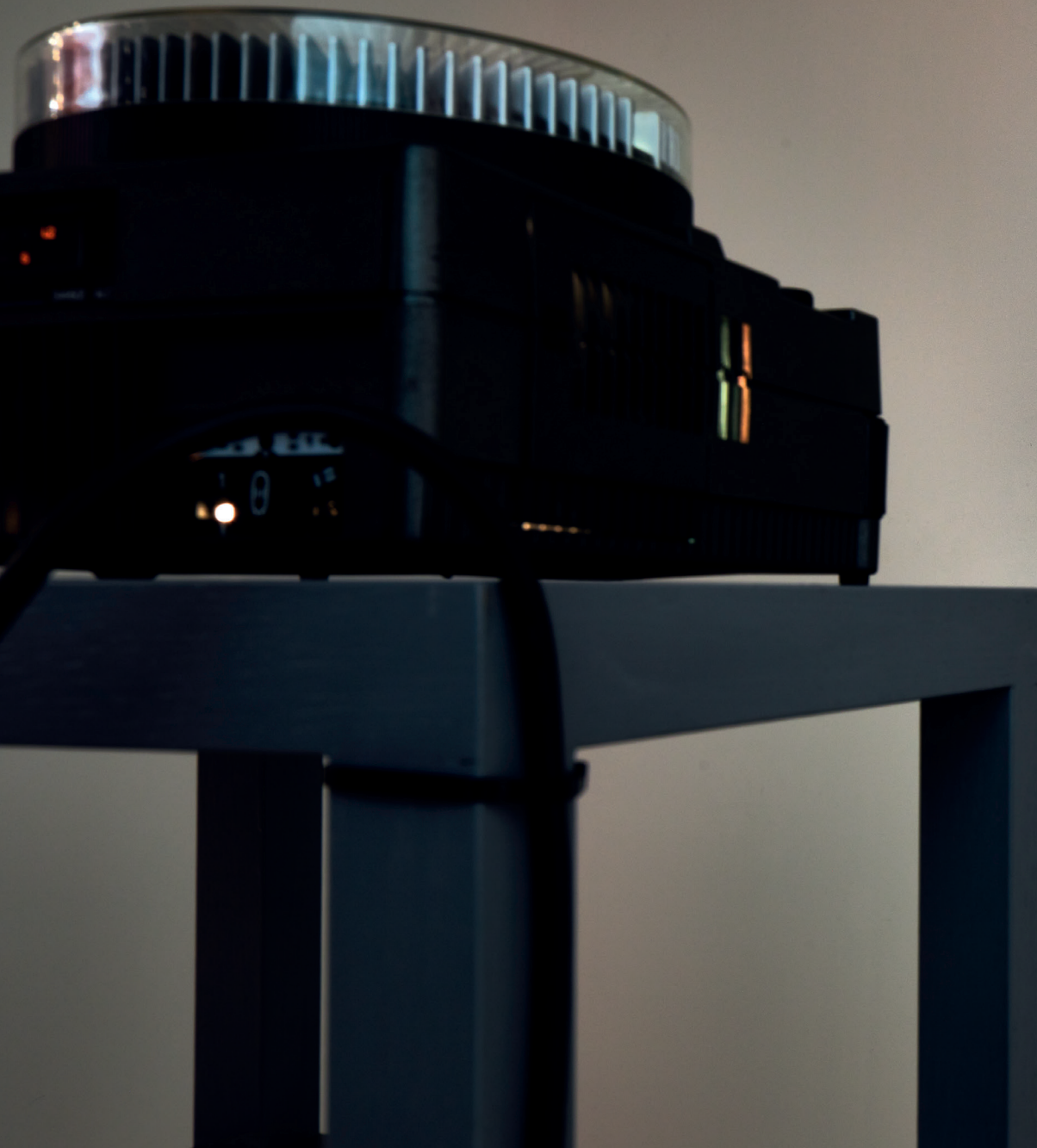
Allan Sekula, Waiting for Teargas (white globe to black), 1999 – 2000, installation view Villa Arson, 2023

work, which take a critical approach to the imperial archive.[59]

In looking to conjunctural analysis, microhistory, critical fabulations and potential history, this research project points to practices that differ from what curator and theorist Bassam El Baroni would describe as the unabashedly speculative in contemporary art.[60] The methodologies and historiographies cited here maintain a proximity to the worlds they seek to map and intervene in. They do not 'drop' the 'burden of equilibrium between fiction and real', which Baroni sees, 'where various social injustices and inequalities can be challenged by constructing and interjecting worlds that reveal prejudices and enact society otherwise'.[61] Rather, in different ways they seek to face them.

Errata, installation view, Fundació Antoni Tàpies Museum, Barcelona, 2019

59   See, for example, Azoulay's *Errata* exhibition at Fondació Antion Tàpies, Barcelona, 11 October 2019 – 12 January 2020, where she presented documents, photographs, publications and her own drawings relating to the history of WWII, Palestine and other colonial projects. The exhibition deployed textual and visual interventions, including adding or taking away elements in material, juxtaposing different types of material to point to errors or incongruencies in archives. See https://fundaciotapies.org/en/exposicio/ariella-aisha-azoulay-errata/. Azoulay's notion of potential history is key for curator Doreen Mende's exhibition *Hidden Labour Across*, Kunstverein Leipzig, 22 August – 21 October 2020, which I discuss in 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices'. Placing a number of artists' work in dialogue with one another Mende evokes Azoulay's notion of potential history to create imagined alliances across what she describes as 'violent erasures of history'. 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 forge 'potential' linkages across the GDR in the 1970s to workers in South Korea and contemporary India. This device, which simultaneously foregrounds lived experiences, while 'fabulating' on possible, imagined connections across time – a chronopolitical 'rewinding' to borrow Azoulay's phrase – offers a speculative model for mobilising research practice (both curatorial and artistic) that gives form to Mende's proposition of nonrepresentational research within the domain of research-exhibition making. See https://entangled-internationalism.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/FIN_Hidden_Labour-Across_inter∞note01_booklet.pdf.

60   See Bassam El Baroni, 'Whither the Exhibition in the Age of Finance? Notes Towards a Curatorial Practice of Leveraging', in *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, 96 – 103.

61   What I find compelling in El Baroni's analysis is not that he decries such use of speculation or 'world forming' within the 'secret contract' of the exhibition space. It is that such speculation when coupled with a form of 'leveraging' events, networks, structures beyond that space has consequences for back-end processes. In this regard, El Baroni reformulates the articulation of the abstract and the concrete into the financialised language of speculation and leveraging.

Historiographic approaches contribute to the thinking through within this project of the exhibition-as-inquiry, and the interplay of approaches within a single exhibition. In *Rewinding*, for example, visitors move from the microhistorical in *Waiting for Teargas* to critical fabulation with male bureaucrats debating an imminent catastrophe in Pekün's *Disturbed Earth*, while the exhibition as a whole – with its disparate but interjecting political, social and cultural forces – is approached as a form of conjunctural analysis, or cultural study. This begins to offer a language for describing how research process and the political are approached within certain types of exhibition making.

Yet, in drawing on historical analysis models from other disciplines, one inevitably misses that which is specific to exhibition making. Further, by mapping them onto exhibition practices they are in danger of themselves becoming representational. As forms of analysis, historical or cultural, they are largely discursive formations that take place through writing. Exhibitions are multi-sensorial experiences. People move through them. They look, listen, walk from room to room, sit down and turn around. They are in the company of others. It is a bodily and sensorial encounter as well as a discursive one. Some recent criticism has discounted the aesthetics of 'research-exhibitions' or lamented the shortcomings of 'post-sensual aesthetics'.[62] That said, spatial and sensorial considerations are vital components for exhibitions to operate as processes of research and that engage the political. To be clear, this is not to discount artistic or research practices or to cling to the primacy of exhibitions. Rather, it is to pay close attention to the exhibition's specific affordances. In order to move beyond a 'reading' of an exhibition, or what it is 'saying' or 'about' – to engage in it as an encounter, one needs to move into the space of the exhibition itself. This requires a

62   See, for example, Claire Bishop, 'Information Overload', *Artforum*, vol. 61, no. 8, 2023 and James Voorhuis, *Postsensual Aesthetics: On the Logic of the Curatorial*, Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2023.

shift from approaching exhibitions as sites of analysis to describing their spatial, sensorial and scenographic qualities – not as detached from historiographic approach, but as something that actualises it, countering its representational drive.[63]

In the introduction to Part 2 of 'On the Question of Exhibition' we, the editors identified how the contributions collectively 'bridg(ed) 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 'was not to create a dichotomy but rather to set up a field of tension and interface between different moments of production-analysis'.[64] This chapter foregrounds the onto-epistemological as a key terrain for research-exhibition practices. Beginning with how curatorial discourse had prioritised epistemological claims while deprioritising the exhibition, the primary motivation for that shift was noted as being to counter the representational limits of the exhibition. The central research task of this project is to investigate the epistemological possibilities of the curatorial *through* the specificities of an exhibition practice and give greater focus to the operational register within exhibition discourses. The chapter also drew attention to the under-developed language used to describe processes of research within exhibitions, pointing to different strategies that might develop discourse in this area. It identified methods wherein specific events, relations and contexts can be engaged simultaneously

with form (through more literary approaches such as microhistory or critical fabulation) while recognising the limits of the analogy with respect to the formal and spatial conditions of exhibitions. Such considerations (or their formal instantiation) are not foregrounded in more generalised accounts of exhibitions. In the next chapter, '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations', the eponymous exhibition is mapped, demonstrating how the project operationalises concerns such as collaborative research projects or scenography. Along with 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*', these chapters underscore the operational register of exhibitions to show how they intersect with and inform their own epistemological potential.

63   In this sense, the type of engagement with the specifics of an exhibition that I am interested in differs from that which takes place in the growing field of exhibition histories. In, for example, the *Afterall* exhibition series floor plans and worklists are scrupulously analysed and viewed in tandem with the exhibition as social 'event', a form of 'making public'. In this sense the approach of exhibition histories takes a wider framework to analyse exhibitions retrospectively. My project is concerned with the operations of exhibitions from the perspective of a practioner. For a description and bibliography of *Afterall*'s exhibition histories, see https://www.afterall.org/projects/exhibition-histories/.

64   See the introduction to Part 2 of N. Aikens, K. Caminha, J. Mistry and M. Wilson (ed.), *On the Question of Exhibition*, HDK Valand, 2021.

Rewinding Internationalism: Processes and Operations

This chapter reviews the processes and operations of the exhibition *Rewinding Internationalism*, turning to the project's genealogy before tracing its development. It begins by looking at the relationship between *The Place Is Here* surveying the work of B/black artists in 1980s Britain and which I curated. The chapter details how *The Place Is Here*, an exhibtion surveyin the work of serves as a precursor to *Rewinding Internationalism* – in its chronological framing and the adoption of 'New Internationalism' as a concept by artists and thinkers active in 1980s Britain. At the same time the chapter describes how *Rewinding Internationalism* offers a contrasting approach to the framing of nation and race used in *The Place is Here*. Another context the chapter identifies for the project is the museum confederation L'Internationale and its four-year programme 'Our Many Europes' that focused on the 1990s. L'Intenrationale and 'Our Many Europes' offers a research frame for the current project, while also prompting questions on the confederation's evoked association with a socialist history and how Europe is positioned as 'ours'. The chapter then introduces the term 'rewinding', borrowed from theorist and artist Ariella Aïsha Azoulay: its insistence on an entangled relationship between past and present as well as the need to re-engage concepts and terms often accepted as given. The chapter then describes the process of developing the exhibition across commissions, collaborative projects and loans, emphasising the compositional nature of the exhibition. Following an exploration of the first iteration of the project at Netwerk Aalst, staged as a 'rehearsal' in February – May 2022, the chapter details the emphasis on scenography in the second iteration at the Van Abbemuseum.

The occasion of this project is a means to explore how the relationship between a process of exhibition making, inquiry and an engagement with the political is staged. It is part of a strategy to foreground processes and operations as intersecting with and informing the overall research project. Multiple and overlapping discursive, operational and subjective factors come to bare on the project. These include my own research and curatorial trajectory, the context of the Van Abbemuseum and its role within a Europe-wide consortium of museums in L'Internationale and the more experimental processes in exhibition spaces and with artists and a scenographer. The chapter maps the context of the exhibition (taking a term from cultural studies) as opposed to providing a diary of events constructed retrospectively that would allow for a more forensic analysis of the process.[1] Mapping the context brings into view the concerns and operations that inform the process of inquiry. This is not an exemplar of how to conduct a research-exhibition project, but a recounting in dialogue with practices touched upon in the chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology'. For example, strategies of conjunctural analysis and microhistory identified in the exhibitions *How Did We Get Here* or the film work of Hira Nabi appear in the approach to the exhibition. The chapter serves as a precursor to 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*', introducing the processes and starting points that lead to the exhibition's eventual realisation in Eindhoven. Viewed together, these two chapters attempt to address the lack of language for processes, operations and realisation of exhibitions noted in 'Beyond Representing Ideology'.

Genealogies

The genealogies of *Rewinding Internationalism* begin with *The Place Is Here* (2016 – 19), a research and exhibition project coming to a conclusion as this one began and whose evolution across multiple versions informs this project's framing – namely the shift from foregrounding race and nation to the more open, or opaque construct of internationalism. *The Place Is Here* comprises a series of four exhibitions and a

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1   J. D. Slack, 'Theories and Methods of Articulation in Cultural Studies', 125.

publication, presenting the work and archives of black artists in 1980s Thatcherite Britain.[2] The first exhibition is conceived as a chapter in a larger exhibition *The 1980s. Today's Beginnings?* (2016) that I co-curated at the Van Abbemuseum and part of the five year L'Internationale project 'The Uses of Art'.[3] *The 1980s* began with an interest in the decade's social and political conditions, and the curators wanted to devise an exhibition form to bring together the research across the confederation looking at different counter-cultures.[4] We devised a structure that consisted of six chapters, four of which rotated during the exhibition's five-month run and were curated by colleagues as versions of existing exhibitions they had done or that brought together research into their collections and archives.[5] The hope was to create a constellation of different narratives from the 1980s. Some of these turned to single groups (the work of Video-Nou in Catalonia, for example), others took a broader lens (such as the single-gallery version of *How Did We Get Here*, exploring Turkey during that decade). Together

2   *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 expands 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 Badovinac, Teresa Grandas, Merve Elveren and Fefa Vila Núñez, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 16 April – 25 September 2016.
3   *The 1980s* is part of the five-year programme 'The Uses of Art' by museum consortium *L'Internationale* For a description of the programme and details of individual projects see https://www.internationaleonline.org/programmes/the_uses_of_art.
4   The extended exhibition guide in the form of a newspaper, and with texts by contributing curators can be found at https://d2tv32fgpo1xal.cloudfront.net/files/de-jaren-80.pdf.
5   The chapters in the exhibition were: 'Talking Back: Counter-Culture in the Netherlands', curated by Diana Franssen; 'Thinking Back: A Montageof Black Art in Britain', curated by Nick Aikens; 'NSK: From Kapital to Capital. An Event in the Final Decade of Yugoslavia', curated by Zdenka Badovinac (Moderna galerija, Ljubljana); 'Video Nou/Servei de Video Comunitari, Video-Intervention in the Spanish Transition', curated by Teresa Grandas (MACBA, Barcelona); 'How Did We Get Here: Turkey in the 1980s', curated by Merve Elveren, SALT, Istanbul; 'Archivo Queer? Screwing the system then and now' (Madrid 1989 – 1995 curated by Fefa Vila Núñez (independent researcher i.c.w. Museo Reina Sofía, Madrid).

The 1980s: Today's Beginnings?, installation view of Talking Back. Counter Culture in the Netherlands', (above) and 'Archivo Queer? Screwing the System' (Madrid 1989 – 1995) (below), curated, Van Abbemuseum, 2016

The 1980s: Today's Beginnings?, installation view of 'Video-Nou/Servei de Video Comunitari: video-intervention in the Spanish Transition' (above) and 'NSK: From Kapital to Capital. An Event in the Final Decade of Yugoslavia' (below), Van Abbemuseum

they offered a narrative – or set of narratives – from multiple perspectives. Two further chapters, comprising six galleries, stayed for the duration of the project and were curated by myself and my colleague Diana Franssen. The strategies of historical analysis touched upon in 'Beyond Representing Ideology' are identifiable in *The 1980s* chapters: the previously cited conjunctural analysis of *How Did We Get Here*, the microhistory of Video Nou, a form of collective practice that emerged in the beginning of Spain's Transition following the death of Franco or a form of 'potential history' being deployed by the collective NSK and their imagining of the NSK 'state in time' at the turn of the 1990s.[6] *The 1980s* contained within it a wish to offer multiple accounts of a decade, of a moment, rather than announce a single perspective. Drawing from the work of colleagues in the confederation to examine a conjuncture from multiple positions would be developed further with *Rewinding Internationalism*. Yet, as I go on to describe, *Rewinding* was an attempt to move away from the self-contained, individually authored chapters of *The 1980s* with their national framings, to create more dynamic relationships across context and form, and a more considered relationship between modes of presentation and their instantiation in space.

The chapter *Thinking Back: A Montage of Black Artists in 1980s Britain*, turns to artists and archives associated with what has come to be termed the Black Art Movement.[7] In the essay 'A Complex Unity:

6   See Eda Čufer and Irwin, 'NSK STATE IN TIME', Ljubljana, 1992, https://www.irwin-nsk.org/texts/nsk-state-in-time/.

7   The Black Art Movement is a contentious term, and one I avoid using in relation to these exhibitions. 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 n 1982, writes: '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 Movement.' Keith Piper, 'Wait, Did I Miss Something? Some Personal Musings on the 1980s and Beyond', in David A. Bailey, Ian Baucom and Sonia Boyce (ed.), *Shades of Black: Assembling Black Arts in 1980s Britain*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005, 36.

The 1980s: Today's Beginnings?, installation view of 'How Did We Get Here. Turkey in the 1980s',
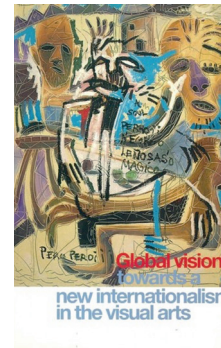Van Abbemuseum, 2016

Articulating the 1980s' in the submission I reflect on the back and forth between conducting an exhibition-research project that looks to a particular frame and sociopolitical context while allowing artworks and archival practices to speak *for themselves*.[8] *Thinking Back* and subsequently *The Place Is Here* attempt to 'articulate' art works, archives – the sociopolitical context and the ways in which practitioners curate, organise, publish and disseminate. At the Van Abbemuseum and Nottingham Contemporary, the project's largest iteration, it is grouped under titles that borrowed form artworks, rather than through themes or chronology as a means to foreground the artists' work. The edges of the 1980s are porous, extending before and after the decade. In this regard artworks are not used to illustrate, represent or account for something, rather their very *assembly*, to borrow Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung's phrase, in the form of an exhibition, allows the ideas and histories contained in them to *speak* to one another.[9]

The opportunity to develop – both expand and contract – the exhibition at different moments has been significant. Rather than a 'touring' show where a group of works are assembled in one place and travel to different venues, the four iterations have separate checklists, loans, archival displays and architectures. Artists and works were brought in depending on the contexts and the architecture.[10] In practice this meant

audiences are presented with varying constellations of artworks and archives, underscoring the constructed nature of histories when evoked through exhibitions.

The shift from an overt address of race and nation in *The Place Is Here* to internationalism mirrors that in discourse from the 1980s to the 1990s, and in my curatorial and analytical approach. In 1994 many of the artists and intellectuals in *The Place Is Here* gathered at Tate Britain in London for the conference 'A New Internationalism'. The conference was the inaugural event hosted by iniva, Institute of International Visual Arts and was, in some respects, a culmination of the struggle for institutional visibility and legitimacy fought by artists, intellectuals and organisers in the UK throughout the preceding decade. For their first public event, iniva invited speakers from across the world to respond to 'New Internationalism', a term that had been written into the founding charter of the organisation. The construct, defined in relation to the hegemony of European and Western 'internationalism', sought to 'place the achievements of the majority cultures of the world into the discourses, the exhibitions and the history of contemporary visual arts'.[11] Many of the speakers at the conference, including Olu Oguibe whose work appears in *Rewinding*, expressed deep reservations about the embrace of a 'New Internationalism' that was announced from Western Europe, reproducing divisions and biases under the guise of plurality.[12]

8   The essay acknowledges, how, '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.' The essay suggests articulation as a 'conceptual and theoretical device' to work through the tension . between contextual and formal readings. I write: '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"'. Nick Aikens, 'A Complex Unity', 23.
9   See Ndikung, 'On est Ensemble.'
10   For example, I included the work of photographer Dave Lewis in the South London Gallery iteration after learning he lived and worked in nearby Camberwell as well as an archival display on the Brixton Art Gallery, also in South London. Or, at MIMA, we included Sonia Boyce's *She Ain't Holding Them Up, She's Holding On (Some English Rose)* (1986) as it was in MIMA's collection.

11   Taken from the report towards the formation of iniva in the iniva archive, cited in Lotte Philipsen, *Globalizing Contemporary Art: The Art World's New Internationalism*, Aarhus, Denmark: Aarhus University, 2010.
12   Particularly vocal was artist and founder of *Third Text* Rasheed Araeen. In his contribution to *Globalizing Contemporary Art*, 'New Internationalism, or the Multiculturalism of Global Bantustans', Araeen expresses scepticism that the 'recoding' of internationalism amounted merely to the 'construction of an outer wall or façade'. He agrees there 'was an urgent need to shift the concept of internationalism', but asked if 'a radical shift [were] possible', without questioning the prevailing internationalism and the ideas, attitudes and values which form and code its structure? Is this possible', he reflected, 'within the existing Eurocentric framework?'. In his contribution 'A Brief Note on internationalism' to the same book, artist Olu Oguibe lamented how little had been done to 'de-centre internationalism' from the West, and although New Internationalism purported to challenge Western hegemony it was still a term that was being derived from Europe.

The Place is Here, installation view with works by Rasheed Araeen, Ceddo and the June Givanni Pan African
Cinema Archive, Nottingham Contemporary, 2017

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

The Place is Here, installation view with works by David A. Bailey, Ceddo, Sonia Boyce, Sunil Gupta, Mona Hatoum, Mowbray Ondonkor, Maybelle Peters, Maud Sulter, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, 2017

During the 1980s, terms such as 'B/black art', and the 'black arts movement' were contested.[13] By the early 1990s, those tasked with developing the remit and scope of iniva opted not to define the institution in relation to race or ethnicity but attempted to go past it with the term New Internationalism. Importantly, New Internationalism continued to 'embrace' the term 'black art', which they saw as 'hing[ing] upon a cross-fertilisation of views in the contemporary visual arts'.[14] Yet, rather than limit the framework to questions of race or ethnicity, the offer of a 'new' internationalism appeared to speak to a more pluralistic outlook. Equally, whereas 'B/black art' was ostensibly borrowed from the US in the early 1980s, New Internationalism positioned itself, as the name emphasised, as a previously unchartered framework through which to frame an artistic, institutional and discursive position. Yet the folding in – and failure to problematise – the term black art within the construct of New Internationalism is symptomatic of how the art system since the 1990s engages the category of race within a wider call to the international. This ostensibly maintains the emphasis on context and position central to the politicised nature of Black art

13   At the First Black Art Convention, held in Wolverhampton in 1982 and organised by the Blk Art Group the term black art was already a contested term. The debate that would roll on in the following years centred on whether to name artists and their work in relation to race. Some saw it as central to articulating their subject positions in relation to the history and institutional context that they were speaking, while aligning themselves with the trajectory of Black Art in the US or Pan-Africanism; others felt it limiting to define their work as artists in relation to race. The debates over what constituted blackness were prominent in cultural studies and theory throughout the 80s. In 1988 Hall aligned the term 'black' (small b) with 'the common experience of racism and marginalisation in Britain' and that 'came to provide the category of a new politics of resistance, amongst groups and communities with in fact, very different histories, traditions and ethnic positions'.
In contrast, recently curator Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung has argued for 'decanonization'. See Ndikung, 'The Globalized Museum?'.
14   New Internationalism is used as part of the founding documents/ terms of the institute. In the description of the term they say: 'New Internationalism' embraces the concept of "Black Art" because it hinges upon a cross-fertilisation of views in the contemporary visual arts. However it allows artists a choice, a subjective decision-making process based on personal experience which takes it beyond the definitions of "Black Art".' Iniva founding documents, iniva archive.

in the US and UK, at the same time as breaking with such divisions under the auspices of a newly internationalised art system. Equally, by seeking to mark a departure with the debates and discussions that had preceded New Internationalism – and by inference the structural exclusions (across the art system and society at large) that had given rise to those debates – the term New Internationalism could be seen to evoke what Azoulay sees as a defining feature of imperial histories, where breaks, notions of progress and defining the new seals off the past and renders it separate from the present, allowing structures to replicate themselves.[15] New Internationalism, then, as a project, is a starting point precisely because of the problematics it points to, rather than the possibilities it affords.

Neither the term nor reference to the 1994 conference feature in the exhibition, except for the inclusion of Oguibe's work, or obliquely through the presence of the Gate Foundation archive.[16] However, it is one starting point (along with that of the confederation) that raises questions regarding the approach to race, ethnicity and nation within the project (and wider discourse), and how it shifted from the 1980s into the 1990s and into today. Such a shift is contrasted in the work of two preeminent thinkers, Hall and Da Silva who have been significant for my changing approach. Hall, in a series of lectures in 1994 situated 'Race, Ethnicity and Nation' as interconnected, discursive formations, or what he calls 'sliding signifiers'.[17] Da Silva has argued

that the racial, the nation and cultural (rather than the ethnic) should be considered in correlation with one another.[18] The way this correlation is approached, however, differs vastly in their respective analyses. Hall, like other cultural theorists in the 1980s and 1990s, drew on political theorist Antonio Gramsci to argue that race, nation and ethnicity should be considered within their socio-historical context.[19] Da Silva names this strand of cultural theory that places emphasis on context, 'CRES' – critical race and ethnic studies.[20] Da Silva argues that such a position, 'rendering the racial as a socio-historical category reproduces the erasures that (trans)formed racial difference into a signifier of cultural difference'.[21] Da Silva argues that the discursive approach overlooks the underlying causes of the racial as a category, which she traces back to the Enlightenment and the birth of the transparent subject. Understanding the movement between these two positions is *one* way to see what is at stake in the move from *The Place Is Here* to *Rewinding Internationalism*: the former could be read as emphasising socio-historical context (1980s Thatcherite Britain and 'The Great Moving Right Show'), accepting such a context and construct as given. The latter attempts to account for – or trouble – that construct by working through and with a plurality of subjectivities, authors, formats and approaches as well as with practices where the question of how knowledge is produced and mediated is central to the work.[22] In this sense, there is an attempt to move from a transparent I that hovers unannounced in *The Place Is Here* to a less

15   See particularly Azoulay's section 'Unlearning the New, With Companions' where she calls for the needs to find precedents and allies that have come before rather than seeking to find 'political initiatives, concepts, or modes of thinking, including critical theory, that are devised and promoted as progressive and unprecedented. Instead it insists that finding precedents – or at least assuming that precedents could be found – for resistance to racial and colonial crimes is not the novel work of academic discovery.' A. A. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 17.
16   The Gate Foundation and iniva were both set up and with a similar remit and are contemporaneous. Many of the conferences and workshops that appear in the recordings of susan pui san lok/lok pui san such as *REWIND/REPLAY* include speakers connected to iniva.
17   See Stuart Hall, *The Fateful Triangle* (ed. Kobena Mercer), Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2017.

18   Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, XXXvi.
19   Other key works from this period that draw on Gramsci would be Paul Gilroy, *There Ain't No black in the Union Jack: The Cultural Politics of Race and Nation*, London: Hutchison, 1987 which is a key exploration of the social conditions of race and racism in 1980s Britain.
20   Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race*, xxv.
21   *Ibid*., xxxvi.
22   See Stuart Hall, 'The Great Moving Right Show', *Selected Political Writings: The Great Moving Right Show and Other Essays* (ed. Sally Davison, David Featherstone, Michael Rustin and Bill Schwarz), Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, pp.172-186.

certain, multiplicity of positions and forms in *Rewinding Internationalism*.[23]

In *The Place Is Here* the subject of study is the work of black artists, filmmakers and intellectuals within the context of 1980s Britain, framed so as not to present a fixed narrative (chronological or otherwise). Similarly, the invitation to artists and organisers such as the Blk Art Group Research Project, the June Givanni PanAfrican Cinema Archive or the Making Histories Visible Archive to present and curate archival displays attempts to counter a single, authored position.[24] Yet despite this, the area of inquiry – b/Black artists in 1980s Britain – is clear.[25] With *Rewinding Internationalism*, there is a deliberate uncertainty in precisely what is being presented. 'Internationalism' is not a subject, or context that is identifiable or secure. Through its multiple collaborators, commissions, temporalities, it is untethered from a single source with the question of what and who is being represented constantly at stake.

L'Internationale

I now move to the European museum confederation L'Internationale, which serves as a starting context and resource from which the research project is situated. The relationship to the confederation plays out across multiple symbolic, discursive and operational registers. Since 2009, L'Internationale, of which the Van Abbemuseum and HDK-Valand are partners,

Score for L'Internationale
by Eugène Pottier, 1870

defines itself by offering a 'a new internationalist model for heritage today, challenging traditional notions of exclusiveness, closure and property'.[26] The confederation aligns itself with the history of socialist internationalism, taking its name from the French nineteenth-century workers anthem and defines its 'ethics [as] based on the values of difference and antagonism, solidarity and commonality'. Working on multiple projects across the confederation over the past eleven years, I have found myself both aligned with its institutional, political project while harbouring reservations about its self-positioning and claims.[27] Rather than attempt to resolve these reservations during the exhibition project, they are set in motion and played out through its framing and methodology.

The respective partners lay claim to pursuing 'decolonising practices' and a 'demodernising agenda' as part of its 'new internationalist model'.[28] L'Internationale, however, like museums at large that engage 'decolonising' practices (artistic, discursive, epistemological), attempt to embark on a model based on 'commonality' and 'challenging exclusiveness' while acknowledging that museums and their 'imperial technologies' are the result of what decolonial thinkers identify as the modern/colonial project that developed and propagated systems of differentiation

23   Of course both projects took place through the framing and 'imperial technologies' of the museum. My point is that in *Rewinding Internationalism* the issue of who was authoring and composing the narrative was addressed from the outset.

24   The archive presentations include: the Blk Art Group Research Project curated with Claudette Johnson and Marlene Smith; Making Histories Visible curated with Lubaina Himid; June Givanni PanAfrican Cinema Archive curated with June Givanni and the Brixton Art Gallery archive curated with Andrew Hurman.

25   It is also worth distinguishing between these group of practitioners as being part of an acknowledged 'movement' (no matter how unformed that movement was) in contrast to *Rewinding* where it was working through an idea, or construct through a constellation of practices and events.

26   See https://www.internationaleonline.org/about/.

27   At the tine of writing I was on the editorial board of L'Internationale Online and contributing to projects in 'The Uses of Art' and 'Our Many Europes' programmes. I have subsequently been appointed (since August 2023) as Managing Editor and Research Responsible for L'Internationale Online.

28   Specific publications, produced by L'Internationale have addressed this, such as *Decolonising Museums* (2016), https://d2tv32fgpo1xal. cloudfront.net/files/02-decolonisingmuseums-1.pdf and *Decolonising Archives*, https://d2tv32fgpo1xal.cloudfront.net/files/03-decolonisin-garchives.pdf. Charles Esche, director of the Van Abbemuseum has introduced the proposition of the 'demodern'. Charles Esche, 'The Demodernising Possibility', in Paul O'Neill, Lucy Steeds and Mick Wilson (ed.) in *How Institutions Think Between Contemporary Art and Curatorial*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017, 212 – 21, https://www.academia.edu/30154835/The_Demodernising_Possibility_a_lecture_.

The Place is Here, installation view with wirks by Ingrid Pollard and 'The Making Histories Visible' archive, Nottingham Contemporary, 2017

leading to exploitation and violence.[29] This project attempts to complicate the relationship between the history of socialist internationalism (as referred to in the confederation's name) and its compatability with a decolonial agenda. 'L'Internationale' (the anthem and by implication the confederation) is aligned with a history of Marxism, a macro-systems worldview devised in Europe that centres class and (a version of) economics (that did not place the black atlantic trade centrally) at the seeming expense of colonial exploitation and questions of gender. As decolonial thinker Olivier Marboeuf persuasively argues, the beginnings of the Marxist economic production line begins in the factories of Manchester, not the plantations of the Caribbean.[30] *Rewinding Internationalism*, from the beginning, has been an attempt to approach the construct of internationalism from intersecting perspectives that complicate this reading, both in terms of an outdated reductionism, and understanding its potential (in)compatibility with the decolonial or the demodern.

'Our Many Europes' (OME), the four-year EU-funded programme of which *Rewinding Internationalism* is a part, takes as its focus the 1990s. In this sense my own practice is both part of, and a response to, the research trajectory of the confederation. It was in

the 1990s that the concepts of New Internationalism and Expanding Internationalism were being put forward in the art system as the purported means to overcome the exclusions of Western art history. This was happening at precisely the moment when the end of the Cold War and 'actually existing socialism' precipitated the ebbing of an international horizon for the left and prompted Francis Fukuyama to proclaim 'the end of history' and liberal democracy as the only game in town.[31] Further still, following a decolonial approach that understands the very concept of Eurocentrism as beginning in 1492 with the conquest of Abya Yala (the Americas), L'Internationale's programme name 'Our Many Europes' points to a *here* or *us* defined in relation to a *them* or *there*, a clear example of what Edward Said would name an *imagined geography*.[32] In the formation of this project is a wish to work in between the conceptual and ideological knots embedded within L'Internationale and 'Our Many Europes'.

Rewinding

The project's title borrows the term 'rewinding' from Azoulay's *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. In the title the term is not intended as a mapping of Azoulay's references and concerns onto the exhibition. Rather it uses Azoulay's writing as a prompt and an evocation to address events in the past as part of an ongoing present, a troubling of concepts such as the archive as neutral, and as means to question how terms taken to be descriptions of the world – such as internationalism – are understood.[33] In the short pas-

29   Azoulay calls this the 'differential principle'. See A. A. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 34 – 38. For a critical reflection on how vocabularies around 'decoloniosing' circulate in the humanities and institutional contexts, see Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, 'Decolonization is not a metaphor', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society*, vol.1, no.1, 2012, 1 – 40. The essay was shared by Anthony Gardner for the seminar group at the conference 'Transmitting/Documenting/Narrating', Research School of the Faculty of Fine, Applied and Performing Arts, University of Gothenburg, 12 – 13 October 2020. For a critique of the rhetoric and practice around decolonising within museum practices see Brenda Caro Cocotle, 'We Promise to Decolonize the Museum: A Critical View of Contemporary Museum Policies', *Afterall* online, 7 January 2019, https://www.afterall.org/articles/we-promise-to-decolonize-the-museum-a-critical-view-of-contemporary-museum-policies/. Debates on the ways in which indigenous art and practices are taken up by the art system are explored in the anthology Katya García-Antón (ed.), *Sovereign Worlds: Indigenous Art Curation and Criticism*, Amsterdam: Valiz and Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2018.
30   Olivier Marbouef made this point during his lecture 'Decolonial Suites' at the conference 'Considering Monoculture', deBuren, Brussels, 28 February 2020, https://www.internationaleonline.org/programmes/our_many_europes/monoculture/174_decolonial_suites.

31   See Francis Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man*, New York: Free Press, 1991.
32   See Said, *Orientalism*.
33   A. A. Azoulay, *Potential History*, 16. In the opening section of the book Azoulay introduces key concepts and strategies for what she sees as the urgent task of 'Unlearning Imperialism'. These include subheadings such as 'Unlearning the New, With Companions' where she asks that we refute conceptions of the 'new', central to notions of historical 'progress' or the urge to 'discover' untold histories. Rather Azoulay invites readers to 'unlearn' these concepts by engaging with 'companions' of the past – through 'modalities, formations, actions and voices that were brutally relegated to the past and described as over [or] obsolete'.

sage 'Learning to Rewind', Azoulay describes incongruencies among terms or histories drawing on her study of revolutions, the first being the gap between 'the 18th century concept of citizenship and the prestige afforded to its unprecedented political persona despite the tremendous losses people suffered with its advent'.[34] The second is the 'disproportionate' attention placed on imperial revolutions, namely the American and French, 'acknowledged as epochal turning points in political life and political thinking' compared with the less discussed Haitian revolution. Importantly she identifies a problem with accessing these histories in terms of 'what they already were, rather than what they aspired to be'. The third incongruence is the introduction and proliferation of so-called 'neutral' terms and concepts such as sovereignty, the archive, revolution. Far from neutral, Azoulay contends, these 'imperial devices facilitated the plunder and appropriation of material wealth, culture, resources and documents and generated the establishment of state institutions to preserve looted objects and produce a bygone past'. The fourth is between 'the historical narratives of progress and the actual recurrence of the same forms of oppression, destruction and exploitation, with very similar grievances'. As she goes on to describe 'omitted from these narratives proclaiming the progress of citizen's rights is the violence that was involved in defining citizenship as a constituent element of belonging to the state rather than as a shared trait of co-citizens caring for a common world'. In Azoulay's call to 'rewind' history, to unlearn and undo these incongruencies, she warns of the inevitable accusations of nostalgia in revisiting past events as models for the present. Refuting this she demands that we question what the study ('critical or not') of concepts such as neoliberalism (or internationalism) as 'accurate descriptions of the world' entails. 'This', she states, 'is not justice; it is reaction'. By drawing upon Azoulay's

notion of rewinding in the title, the project aims to trouble and address different terms and historiographic methods. For example, the 1990s is not addressed through the lens of 'epochal defining' moments such as 1989. The archive – as container and recorder of history – is exposed as inherently incomplete; practices and stories are approached precisely for 'what they aspired to be' rather than 'what they already were' and the term 'internationalism' is, through the act of accessing it from different, though interrelated perspectives, troubled as an accurate descriptor of the world.

<u>Method and Methodology</u>

Devising the process for the exhibition initiated a trajectory and structure of activity with no defined end point and sought to work with and trouble the context – the confederation – within which I was working. Rogoff identifies the need to work from the specifics of one's practice as a necessary condition for 'advanced practices' that seek to 'face the world'.[35] As the project is invested in the staging of an exhibition, its composition and how it functions as an encounter across multiple referential, analytical, sensorial and spatial registers, the method entailed content strands loosely grouped into three categories: commissioning artists to make new work, initiating a working group within L'Internationale resulting in four collaborative research projects in the show and selecting existing artworks for the overall composition. These categories folded into one another – Barriga's new film *Memory Re-edited. From 1995 in Beijing to Satniago de Chile, 2022* (2022) was commissioned as a result of a research project, Stawarska-Beavan's commissioned sound piece *Zanzibar* (2022) was

34   See 'Learning to Rewind', *ibid.*, 38 – 40. The following quotes are all taken from this section.

35   This was the central thrust of Irit Rogoff's keynote lecture for 'Transmitting/Documenting/Narrating'. Advanced Practices is the name of the postgraduate programme led by Rogoff at Goldsmith's, University of London whose stated aim is to 'engage with recent developments in how "research" is operating in creative practices'. See https://advancedpractices.study/About.

shown alongside the eponymous painting series by Himid. The methodology for commissioning involved working with living artists rooting key elements of the exhibition in the present and investigating internationalism and its permutations in the 1990s from today's vantage points and differing positionalities. If the desire had been to describe events in the decade, artworks and artefacts connected to the period or ideas in question would have been shown. Commissioning, however, initiated a dialogue between the present and the 1990s. Through that work, a process of composing images, sounds and experiences that were not yet known meant something could come into being during the exhibition. Not known beforehand, commissions cannot illustrate a predefined point. The area of research or interest is known, such as pui san lok's long-term interest in the Gate Foundation archive or Pekün's extensive engagement with the Srebrenica genocide. Likewise, detailed discussions with the artists took place about the framing and methodology. But its points of emphasis, its form, which gallery it would go in, how it would interact with other elements in the exhibition were all unknown. It is precisely this element of *not knowing* that I wanted to embark on with commissioning being central.[36]

In considering how a constellation of material that explored internationalism from multiple perspectives, I wanted to create a working structure that would allow many different contexts and positions to come together. *The 1980s* had opted to invite confederation colleagues to present their exhibitions on the decade. Wary of national framings and wanting to arrive at content in dialogue with contributors, rather than outsourcing, a number of colleagues from partner institutions in the confederation were invited to form

Sceen shot of the online L'Internationale working grouop meeting, Autumn, 2021

a working group.[37] These were colleagues I knew well, had collaborated with over a number of years and whose work I admired and trusted.[38] This was a project rooted in, and shaped by, personal and professional relations rather than conceived through formal levels of the confederation. The initial invitation was to attend three meetings. In the first I presented the project, describing its genealogy through *The 1980s* and *The Place Is Here*, the confederation, the wish to work through microhistories rather than offer a history of a decade, commissioning new projects and the wish to explore the term *with* colleagues, rather than arrive at a meaning and then find artworks and archives as illustrations of that meaning.[39] I included some departure points: New Internationalism, the Gate Foundation archive, the anthem 'L'Internationale' and the confederation's explicit (and complicated) ties to a socialist history. I also pointed to microhistories and artworks that felt like possible inclusions – some of which appeared in the final versions.[40] Specifically, I detailed the desire to use the form of the exhibition to generate meaning around the term. The invitation was to respond and propose material or offer feedback that they felt was relevant and generative for the project from their respective situations. The material, I suggested, could be artworks and archives from their institutions; they could be research projects they were currently working on, or simply artists or microhistories that were familiar to them.

Looking back at the recordings and notes from the first meeting, it's revealing to hear the contributions. Some of the initial responses and ideas, such

36   The commissions for *Rewinding Internationalism* include three artists I had worked with previously (Lubaina Himid and Magda Stawarska-Beavan, Didem Pekün and susan pui san lok/lok pui san, one that was a research commission from an open call (Pejvak) and a fifth (Cecilia Barriga) that was suggested by one of the invited researchers, Paulina Varas.

37   I also attempted to form collaborations with iniva through discussions with their director Sepake Angiama but these ultimately petered out.
38   Either through specific projects, the *Glossary of Common Knowledge* or the editorial board.
39   The first presentation included an original song sheet of Eugene Pottier's 'L'Internationale' found online, as well as the cover of 'Global Visions'.
40   Others did not including the artists David Medella and Hüseyin Bahri Alptekin or the exhibition *Art Contre Apartheid* (various venues, 1983).

as the inclusion of Betsy Damon, Allan Sekula's *Waiting for Teargas (white globe to black)* (1999 – 2000), ACT UP-Barcelona, the 1995 Non-Aligned exhibition in Jakarta were discussed and appear nearly two years later. Ways of relating to the term internationalism resonate across the exhibition: for example, Pablo Martínez directing attention away from the 'internationalisation' of the art world in the 1990s, deeply intertwined with processes of glo-balisation and neoliberalisation, to politically inter-nationalist projects not premised on the movement of people (or goods), but rather on a form of inter-nationalist horizon – what I would later come to view through the lens of the political imaginary. Questions were asked about what it meant to bring potentially quite disparate material together. I had been con-structing constellations of microhistories thematically linked (for example, Zapatistas and the anti-globalisa-tion movements or transnational projects such as *Art Contre Apartheid*, 1983 – 1991). As I write in the notes to these meetings, I was keen to arrive at 'something other than an accumulation of material relating to things that happened', adding that it 'may sound like a strange thing to say but [this approach] hopefully points to the possibility of a more blurry, intimate, sometimes troubling (or ambiguous to use Nav's term) constellation of ideas'.[41]

Following that first meeting the working group contributed to a shared folder, uploading material – images, reproductions of archives, texts – related to projects or artworks. In the second and third meet-ings (February and March 2021) members informally introduced the material. In the second meeting we were joined by Paulina Varas from the collective Red Conceptualismos del Sur, at the invitation of Sara Buraya Boned, a long-time collaborator of Museo Reina Sofía in Madrid, who would go on to compose

one of the rooms in the exhibition.[42] Again, it's worth emphasising the range of material – from Varas's three 'nodes' of research covering Félix Guattari's 'Three Ecologies', the journal *Revista de Crítica Cultural* and 'internationalism feminisms', to what Sebastian Cichocki described as 'inter species internationalism of Betsy Damon'. Much did not end up in the show: the highly situated practice of Agustín Parejo School operating in Malaga in the 1980s and 90s and extensively represented in the MACBA collection, the Zapatista movement that begun in 1991, or exhi-bition series in the 1990s grouping practices from Turkey under a national framing and part of a broader 'internationalising' of the art system. These projects and histories were not less valid explorations or access points. Rather, if they did not appear in the exhibition, it was because I had not found formal or spatial mech-anisms (artworks or archives) to mediate them. As the final composition attests, when archives appear they have equal standing to paintings and films, rather than marking or simply representing a history. In the case of the Zapatista movement, I became wary of the way in which this history of armed struggle was being appropriated and circulating within the art system.[43]

From these online meetings bilateral conversa-tions with individual members were sparked in which we discussed ideas in greater detail, refining areas we wanted to look into, discussing specific objects, images, materials. In some cases, this led to intro-ductions and collaborations with further research-ers and curators, as was the case with Equipo re,

41   Quoted from the notes on the first meeting included in the digital appendix, December 2020.

42   See Sara Buraya Boned in conversation with Nick Aikens, 'Situated Internationalisms', in *Rewinding Internationalism*, 119 – 35.

43   At the Van Abbemuseum we had hosted a delegation of the Zapatista movement as well as the Kurdish women's movement in the programme 'From Revolutionary Friendship to Transnational Comradeship: A Programme with the Kurdish and Zapatista Women's Movement', organised by Iliada Charalambous, Sophie Mak-Schram and Denisse Vega de Santiago in October 2021. It was during this gathering, which foregrounded listening to the stories of women and their situated struggles, that I became increasingly cautious about representing the Zapatista movement in the exhibition.

the Catalan collective proposed by Martínez, or inviting the researcher Grace Samboh to work with us on a presentation focusing on the 1995 Non-Aligned exhibition. Each collaboration elicited different approaches. Varas, and Equipo re, for example, proposed a series of research 'nodes' or areas; Piškur and Samboh had a shared starting point, though, as we discuss at length in the publication *Rewinding Internationalism* it was only through the process of exhibition making that we understood how our various interests and entry points intersected with one another.[44]

In addition to the commissions and collaborative projects, there were a small number of loans that I selected to work in dialogue (either formally or thematically) with other elements. The process of arriving at a finished work list is best described as fluid, and stood in contrast to a monographic exhibition, for example – selecting key works in consultation with the artist and referencing existing publications,[45] contingent on practical factors like work locations, transport budget and lenders' requirements. It also differed from *The Place Is Here*, for which I compiled lists of artists and artworks based on more orthodox 'research' techniques – consulting exhibition catalogues of key exhibitions in the 1980s, doing studio visits with artists that would lead to recommendations, further visits and consultation of archives and libraries, or collection inventories. Because the frame of *Rewinding Internationalism* was open, it was not a clearly defined temporal or geographical space, or aligned with a clearly identifiable thematic, but rather a set of concerns and starting points, and as such the process was less methodical.

The commissioning process, development of research projects with L'Internationale colleagues, and my own further reading around the project (both
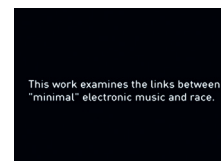
Tony Cokes, *Microhaus or the Black Atlantic?*, 2006 – 08

Tony Cokes: If UR Reading This It's 2 Late, Vol. 1 – 3, installation view, argos centre for audiovisual arts, Brussels, 2020

its content and its process) overlapped. For example, it was through the 'Global Visions' conference, New Internationalism and the critical contribution of Oguibe that I looked to his work as an artist and his piece *Many Thousand Gone* (2000). His work in the exhibition does not have an identifiable link with New Internationalism. Rather, it serves as a space where visitors are enclosed by eighty-two portraits and need to physically encounter a sea of faces staring back at them, who they learn are anonymous portraits of those who lost their lives during the AIDS pandemic in South Africa. Elsewhere the work of Tony Cokes is not something I had identified before seeing *Microhaus or the Black Atlantic?* when visiting his solo exhibition in Brussels.[46] I was struck by the piece for multiple reasons: its mesmerising soundtrack of 90s and early 2000s Detroit and German techno that rolled through the speakers of the exhibition space, its anti-representational device of pairing sound and text, the use of Paul Gilroy's *Black Atlantic*, a reference point for artists I had spoken to involved in *The Place Is Here* with its proposition of a black consciousness, were all folded together. Most significantly perhaps, sitting in the exhibition in Brussels, I understood the piece as a sonic and physical encounter. It spoke through the throbbing bass or rolling high hats as much as through its textual references to the ways in which the roots of a very white German microhaus can be found in African American Detroit techno. The piece afforded a type of experience, that would differ vastly from other encounters of looking, or walking through. In this sense the exhibition – and arriving at a checklist of works – was as much a physical, spatial or experiential *composition,* as it was an exercise in articulating different references or histories.[47]

44   See Bojan Piškur, Grace Samboh, and Rachel Surijata in conversation with Nick Aikens, 'Aligning Research and the Non-Aligned', *Rewinding Internationalism*, 41 – 56.
45   See the final checklist of works in *Rewinding Internationalism*, 165 – 70.

46   Tony Cokes, *If UR Reading This It's 2 Late, Vol. 3*, was at Argos, Brussels, 3 October – 20 December 2020.
47   The emphasis on composition is a reference to the section 'Exhibition as Composition' in the essay 'An Exhibition As …' included in the submission and produced for *I Am Going to Be Your Last Teacher*.

'Rehearsal': *Rewinding Internationalism* at Netwerk Aalst

In the spring of 2021 I was invited to curate an exhibition at Netwerk Aalst, a kunsthalle in Belgium where I was already engaged in convening a series of meetings with artists and researchers associated with their programme.[48] At the time work was under way on the project. Commissions had been started with Pekün and pui san lok, a joint research commission given to the collective Pejvak and initiated with M HKA, Museum of Contemporary Art Antwerp and a number of the research projects arising out of the L'Internationale collaboration were underway. I decided to use the invitation to both develop elements of *Rewinding Internationalism* and test them out in space. It was equally a process through which I was able to refine the terms of the project, and the inquiry. Opening in February 2022, the exhibition includes the two commissions by Pekün and pui san lok, a film work by Wendelien van Oldenborgh, and a series of what I called 'research boards' composed of reproductions related to the collaborative research projects,[49] all of which take place across the building's ground floor, corridor and cinema space.

The main ground floor gallery is given to pui san lok's *REWIND/REPLAY*. The room contains five freestanding projection screens, extended to different heights. Images, containing pixelated stills hit the screens with varying degrees of accuracy, deliberately spilling onto the walls. In the work hundreds of metres

48   I had been invited by Pieternel Vermoortel, then director of Network Aalst to convene a series of internal meetings with artists and curators connected to their programme 'The Astronaut Metaphor'. The meetings took place over the course of three years on and offline due to the pandemic and attempted to forge relationships among practitioners within a programme beyond their individual exhibitions and projects and to see how those encounters might impact the wider functioning of the institution. See Nick Aikens, Pieternel Vermoortel and Attilia Fattori Franchin, 'Netwerk Aalst: The Bodies', HART, 25 February 2021, https://hart-magazine.be/artikels/netwerk-aalst-the-bodies.
49   The full list of works can be found in the guide to *Rewinding Internationalism* at Netwerk Aalst as part of the submission, 123 – 24.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation views, *REWIND/REPLY* (2022), susan pui san lok/lok pui san, Netwerk Aalst, 2022

of magnetic tape, pulled from old VHS tapes hang from the ceiling, gathered in clumps or extending across the room. In the centre of the room is an oval-shaped reflective carpet, with five music stands on which sit wire-bound A3-printed scores, with microphones suspended above seemingly waiting for performers. Red, green and blue lights come on and off in sequence as the projectors move through different images. The sounds of actors speaking semi-absurdist, pseudo-poetic lines over one another ('soon we can leave all the madness behind') are heard through the speakers. In the installation, image and sound is abstracted. The coded purple images we see on the screens are stills from videos by the artist Ho Tam that pui san lok found on a VHS tape in the archive. The song lyrics, performed by actors at the opening, were taken from an unmarked cassette tape, also found in the archive. pui san lok's use of abstraction resonates accross the work, and the exhibition. Within the treatment of the Gate Foundation archive, the artist's strategies are invested in 'countering representational mechanisms' in the archive that would often group artists according to nationality. At the same time, the scrambling, overlaying, sampling, cutting and pasting is a methodology to undo what Da Silva would describe as the 'already known', to rewind it and open it up to new meanings.

Due to a long turnover between exhibitions and fearful of complications due to Covid-19, we were able to install the work over a number of weeks, with the artist visiting from London. Compared to the tight turnaround time (two weeks) of the Van Abbemuseum, the installation period allowed us to test out different possibilities: positioning the screens and projectors to create different levels of spillage onto the walls and how they interacted with the RGB lights, attempting different compositions with the magnetic tape – grouping it in tight bunches, extending it across the length of the space or creating piles on the floor. I decided to open up the back wall of the gallery so visitors could

exit via the far end, following a strip of grey carpet that would lead them to the corridor that housed research boards.

Using the relatively low ceiling of the corridor I devised a system where large grey panels, with rounded corners, would be attached to two metal poles connecting floor and ceiling. The boards contain reproductions from four research projects I was working on: the three nodes proposed by Varas in the context of Chile in the 1990s, 'Keepers of the Waters' (1995 – 96) proposed by Cichocki, 'Contemporary Art of the Non-Aligned Countries: Unity in Diversity in Contemporary Art' in Jakarta in 1995 proposed by Piškur with Samboh, and the archive of ADN, Association pour la Democratie á Nice, a militant organisation founded in 1991 I had encountered during a research residency in the southern French city. The exhibition, when we were in the early stages of gathering material and understanding their role within the project, allowed me to constellate material ranging from photographs, to reproductions of artworks, to copies of documents, creating what were essentially forms of story boards:[50] for example, reproductions of the journal *Revista de Crítica Cultural* are shown next to images of Félix Guattari's trip to Chile in 1992 when he gave his 'Three Ecologies' lecture. Varas and I were then looking at the work of Eugenio Dittborn, associated with the journal; one of Dittborn's large Airmail Paintings appeared at the Van Abbemuseum. At Aalst there was a reproduction of a work in the Reina Sofía collection, which, at the time, we were inquiring whether we could show. The second board presents material related to the work of Betsy Damon. Documentary images from the *Keepers of the Waters* sourced from the Asia Art Archive appear alongside a number of reproductions of the artist's recent works on paper. Cichocki and I were discussing what material

50   Many of the images we present in the exhibition are reproduced in the booklet treated there as its own form of story board, 40 – 90.

Rewinding Internationalism, details of research board, 'Betsy Damon, *Keepers of the Waters*' and 'Contemporary Art of the non-Aligned Countries', Netwerk Aalst, 2022

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Betsy Damon and research boards, Netwerk Aalst, 2022

to present and whether to place focus on the festival in the 1990s or more abstract evocations. Other research boards are similar in form, gatherings of materials we were looking at on the 1990s and entry points to internationalism proposed by colleagues in the confederation. Short texts on each board frame the research with the first appearing on the right, meaning they are 'read' right to left, rewound if you like. Extending out of *REWIND/REPLAY*, is a single piece of magnetic tape alongside the boards and up the stairs, attached to the ceiling and ending in a large pile at the entrance to the cinema.

   Disturbed Earth was shown for the first time at Netwerk Aalst, and unlike *REWIND/REPLAY*, was not further adapted for the Van Abbemuseum. The film is a four-part, thirty-minute piece that follows the twenty-four hours prior to the fall of Srebrenica in 1995 during the Bosnian War. In the script based on transcripts of meetings between UN, NATO and White House officials, all references to place and date are removed. The scenes of white male bureaucrats failing to avert catastrophe become a stand-in for the wider failure of supranational organisations to keep people from harm's length. The film is set in a nondescript basement, the actors in everyday clothes. It is shot on a circular dolly, the camera turning around the actors creating a claustrophobic, circular, repeating history. A sense of rehearsal pervades the film. The scripts rest on the table at which the actors sit. At different moments, the mechanics of the filming process are revealed as a cameraman or dolly track appears. The piece was shot in one day at the onset of the pandemic (it was originally intended to be a feature film) and this improvisation of actors not quite at ease with their material, permeates the dialogue. Combined with the *REWIND/REPLAY* score and research boards, the exhibition, in both its aesthetics and form, is approached as a rehearsal, a working through.

   The emphasis on visitor circulation and how they 'read' the exhibition is important in all three versions.

The carpet that links *REWIND/REPLAY* to the corridor continues up the stairs, where the final research board is positioned, along the first-floor corridor and into the cinema showing Pekün's *Disturbed Earth*. It is cut in a semi-circular shape immediately underneath the cinema screen, echoing the camera circling the protagonists in the film. The carpet is a means to physically link different spaces, a mediation device to signal to visitors where to go. In its grey, strip format and rounded corners it also evokes a form of tape, an analogue roll in proximity with different materials.

   In its fragmentary nature, the exhibition does not attempt to recount a history. Rather, it places elements in constellation to test both their connections at the level of content, as well as formal devices. As they enter, visitors hear a track list comprised of Belgian New Beat compiled by local music expert Steven Keymeulen. The electronic music genre that emerged in the 1990s, with its two main labels Clip Records and Target Records based in Aalst, is defined by a slowing down of rpm. The sonic decompression or unravelling continues as visitors are confronted with streams of magnetic tape in *REWIND/REPLAY.* Upstairs on monitors, *Horizontal* (1997), Van Oldenborgh's two-screen film shot on Super 8, shows two revellers at Aalst carnival rolling on the floor, in relation while out of synch. While situated in 1990s Aalst, in the context of the exhibition the film is a formal device: a means to evoke a sense of choreography, of rewinding and replaying in order to look again and again. Walking through the back of *REWIND/REPLAY* to pass along the research boards, reading them right to left, encountering *Horizontal* only to arrive at *Disturbed Earth* and having to leave the cinema and return along the same path, initiates a process of physical and conceptual rewinding in the exhibition.

   Several things in the Aalst version of the show inform the overall inquiry. Despite my nervousness around presenting something in process, the exhibition's fragmentary nature, its sense of being unteth-

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view, *Disturbed Earth* (2022), Didem Pekün, Netwerk Aalst, 2022

ered from an identifiable narrative, prompts visitors to work through images and ideas to make connections among works and contexts. The sound at the entrance, in *REWIND/REPLAY*, and on the soaring soundtrack to Pekün's piece, create registers of experience and relations to contexts. Aalst in the 90s is transmitted through Belgian New Beat, rather than explained, while the form of the music evokes narratives and histories being slowed down and reformed. This nonrepresentative device would become central to the main iteration of the exhibition. The use of tape and the carpet, while not repeated at the Van Abbemuseum is instructive in thinking through the circulation of the show as well as creating a sense of relation between works and contexts.

Scenography

From early on in the conception of the exhibition I identified the need to work with a scenographer. Firstly, I knew that with a range of seemingly disparate material, the exhibition required a visual and spatial language to create dialogues. Secondly, having worked with exhibition designers, I was aware of the need for both technical and creative solutions to present material beyond my competence. Connecting these was the overarching drive to think *with* someone about the spatial and experiential affordances of the exhibition, the encounters that could be created and how that facilitates meaning making.[51]

In *Rewinding Internationalism*, I worked with theatre scenographer Natascha Leonie Simons for the first time. I was keen to work with a theatre scenographer –

51   The push to create an 'experience' is also something coming from colleagues in the museum who had been expressing a wariness about what they saw as an exhibition that could be overly historical or archival. Despite my best efforts to emphasise its rootedness in the here and now, and my focus on the sensorial and the evocative, management and senior members of the communication department were concerned about the appeal this could have to a wide audience. Positioning the exhibition through a certain 'theatricality' is also a strategic move on my behalf to assuage those concerns.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view, Netwerk Aalst, 2022

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with research board, ADN (Association Pour la Démocaratie à Nice), with Carnavals Independents and Les Diableus Bleus (1991–1994), Netwerk Aalst, 2022

someone who had a sophisticated spatial practice but that, through the project, could discover and test the possibilities, limits and potential of the exhibition. An exhibition designer, I wagered, might have a developed set of visual languages, architectural shorthand if you like, that could be 'applied' to *Rewinding*, which I wanted to avoid. We began with a three-day workshop in early 2022 in Eindhoven when the majority of the show's content had been set even if checklists for the various research collaborations were not confirmed. We talked through the content, commissions, collaborative research projects, loans such as *Waiting for Teargas* or *Microhaus*, and the basis for the project as using the space to generate meaning rather than deliver, represent or illustrate. I expressed my uncertainty about what this exhibition was – based on conversations with colleagues, intuitions of works, discussions with artists. During the three days we spent time in the Old Building of the Van Abbemuseum where the exhibition would be held, understanding its characteristics – its circulation, the natural light that comes through the glass panels, the weight-bearing possibilities of the ceiling, the building's limitations (such as not being able to drill into the floor or its challenging acoustics). We met technical and production colleagues to discuss a working method including timeline and process whereby Simons would deliver design drawings then transferred into technical drawings by our team. These technical and operational processes, rarely discussed in discursive contexts, are vital to secure for experimentation to take place, especially on this scale – working across 1000 square metres, installing 10 galleries in approximately 8 days and with extensive budgets.

It was during this first workshop that Simons and I devised a set or scenographic principles that would inform the design. These were in part based on terms we found ourselves using when talking through the exhibition: the exhibition being *provisional* rather than declarative and secure; *constructed*, not arriving fully

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formed; of having a sense of *improvisation*, feeling its way; the ideas, figures and histories being like *ghosts* lingering in the museum or in the present that existed in a kind of *greyscale*, a *fuzziness* we wanted to accentuate rather than resist. These vocabularies went into a mood board with reference images that Simons had sourced. Materials were added: milky acrylics, semi-transparent curtains, exposed plaster board and metal stud walls. First sketches of display systems followed, with the freestanding modular system that would present archival reproductions and circular railings for hanging curtains that could be projected onto and through.

This led to an outline of scenographic protocols: 1), the walls are not to be used to fix images or objects, rather things hang in space and when they are used they are projected onto or to have things taken off them; 2), colour is achieved through light and filters, rather than material or paint and 3), all construction is visible. The first of the protocols sets up a spatial relationship with the museum whereby the histories and meanings transmitted are not contained, framed or attached to the walls – a gesture to create physical distance from the institution's history of categorisation and exclusion – which means the white walls are largely unadorned like a shell or an empty container through which visitors move. The second greyscale approach to colour – manifest in pre-coloured MDF, unpainted metal, acrylics, untreated plasterboards and exposed metal stud walls – creates distance through a tonal white noise that dulls instead of flattens elements, having no bold assertions of colour or clearly defined edges and rather a tonal 'inbetweenness'. And in the case of the third, the visibility of construction materials furthers the provisionality of the exhibition as *constructed*: objects, images and figures temporarily occupy a space where one can see *through* things.

A key phase in the development of the scenography was sequencing the rooms and circulation of visitors.

Given there is no linear, chronological narrative or argumentation for the show, rather a working, or walking through of ideas and concepts, the sequencing plays a key role in both the experience and subsequent meanings. There needs to be a coherence, a logic to the rooms based on both content on form, and at the same time there are limitations: sound works and videos with ambient sound cannot appear in adjacent rooms, for example, and with sound works by Stawarska-Beavan and pui san lok and films by Cokes and Pekün relying on substantial sonic output, this is a major consideration. At the same time the sequencing needs to allow for registers of experience to follow on from one another – a room comprising multiple materials and sources, such as Varas's three nodes or the archival material central to the Equipo re presentation, could be preceded or followed by single installations, textural or sonic encounters, such as the curtains of magnetic tape in *REWIND/REPLAY* or the rolling beats of *Microhaus*. Circulation here needed to allow ways of encountering material that didn't put forward a single view, a settled story with a beginning, middle and end. I had considered the idea of a large circular wall running through the ten galleries,[52] yet this ultimately felt too representational. I then thought to close off doorways between them, meaning visitors would need to turn back on themselves and pass back through. This breakthrough pushed Simons and I to conceive of multiple routes and think through galleries, viewpoints and encounters from front and back, considering the material in multiple, overlapping sequences. The spatial and experiential proposition counters linearity, both in telling a history or a line of argumentation and in declaring a single perspective able to apprehend everything. It also allows for three
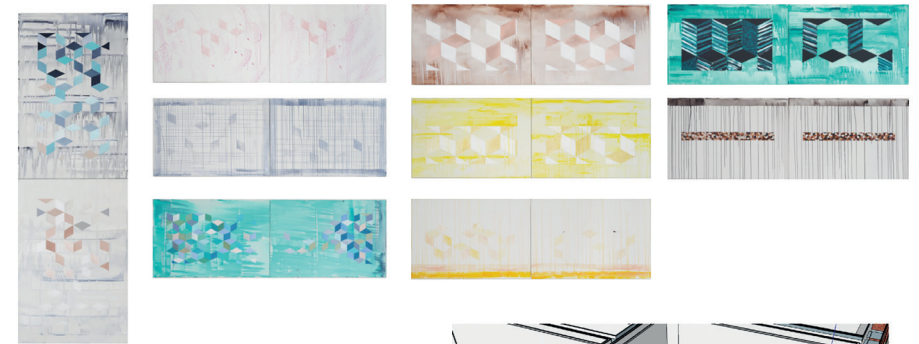
52   The idea of the large circular wall came form a similar device used in the exhibition *The Museum of Arte Útil*, Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 7 December 2013 – 30 March 14, initiated by the artist Tania Bruguera and which I worked on with the museum's then chief curator Annie Fletcher. The scenography for that exhibition was conceived and realised with the collective Construct Lab.

EXHIBITION DESIGN - REWINDING

repetition and revisiting

Letztes Jahr Marienbad - Alain Resnais
(L'Année dernière à Marienbad)

ghosts

moodboard

structure // greyshapes

traces & light

provisional

A1-01 Lubaina Himid

hanging paintings // material
+ wire or strings
+ positions to be defined
+ material for wires/strings

LIGHT
+ natural light (open glas)
+ maybe filter on the glas-panels (particularly?)

SOUND
+ speakers

is there a way to use the 1.20 meters to the wall?
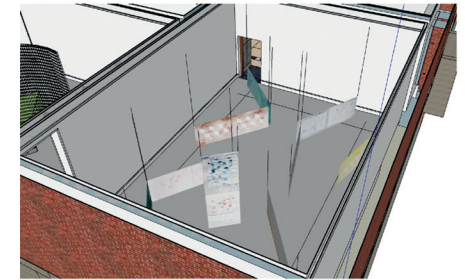
modules // methods // principals

greyshapes

colour(s) through light (light-filters, lamps etc.)

ghosts
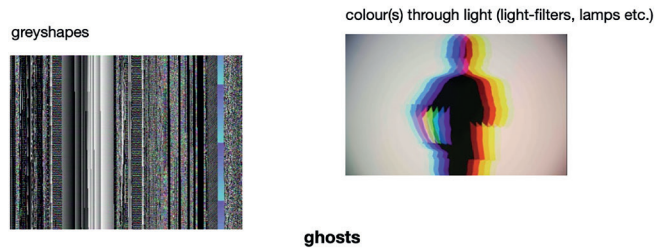
the walls need to be used - no hanging for hanging

repeating, rewinding, revisiting

visible construction

material //
metall, glas, mirror, foam, bricks.

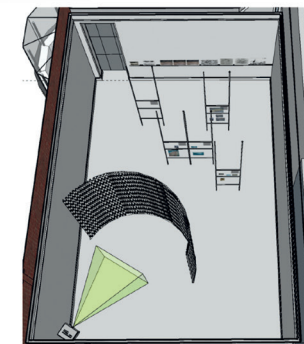**A1-02 Betsy Damon - keepers of the water (research project)**

material // video and print outs
+ video projected on the curtain (semi-tranparent)
+ modules no.1 with front/back
+ shelf on the wall for water prints

LIGHT
+ natural light (open glas)
+ maybe filter on the glas-panels

SOUND
+ the video has a rainy sound

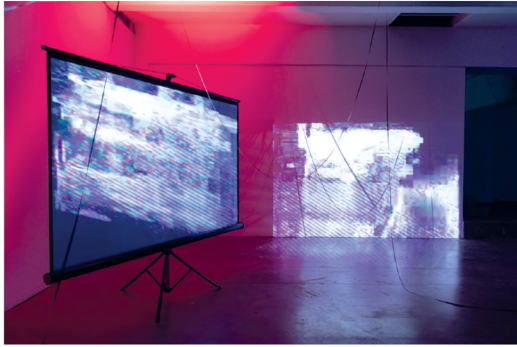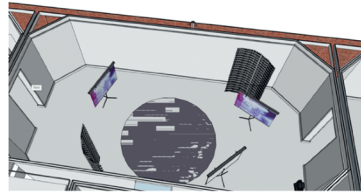*entrance to A1-03 is blocked - visible construction*

Mood boards and preliminary scenography sketches by Natascha Leonie Simons, 2022

A1-05 Susan Pui San Lok
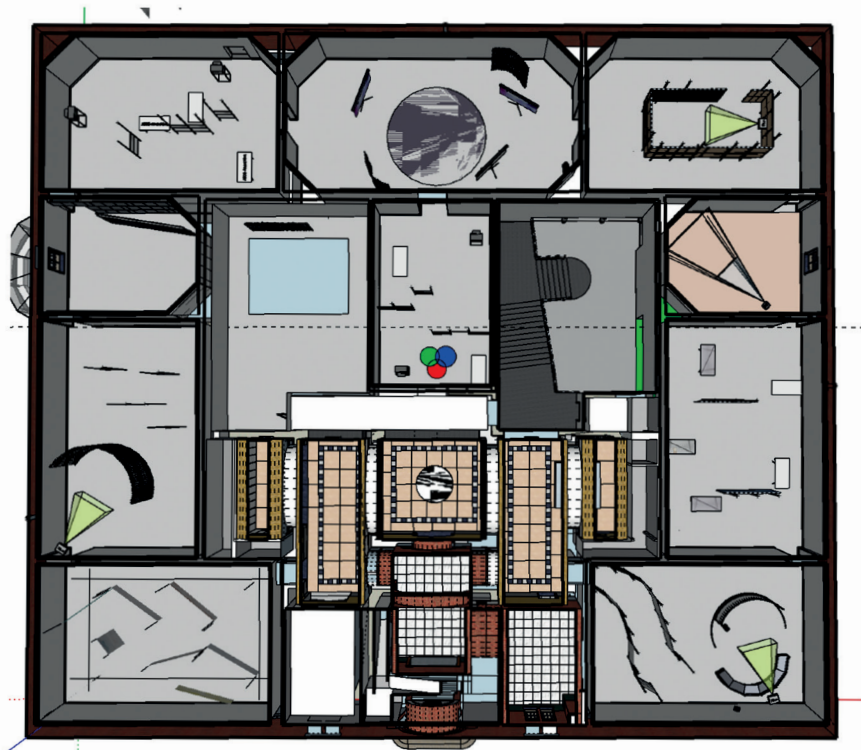*rehearsing the archive*

photo from the exhibition in aalst

material //
+ projections-screens
+ carpet
+ VHS-tape (like to drape this material as a curtain)
+ lights (as part of the piece)
+ stands (with notes)

LIGHT
+ glas panels (blacked out)
+ colors threw the lights from the piece

Preliminary scenography sketches by Natascha Leonie Simons, 2022

clusters or routes, meaning that potentially jarring combinations can be avoided and different moods can be arrived at.

With these building blocks, we embarked on the design of the show, enhanced by being able to visit the Netwerk Aalst exhibition (in which Simons was not directly involved) and then discuss both the content and how the exhibition worked as a physical and sensorial experience. Working with collaborators meant a continual back and forth between myself, researchers, artists and others, and the technical team. Often, as was the case with Equipo re or working with Samboh and Piškur, multiple collaborators worked on a single room. Scenographic decisions frequently needed to take place in conjunction with technical considerations while trying to finalise content contingent on external factors. Locating a painting, processing a loan request, receiving transport quotes, designing a freestanding structure to hang a painting, all the while working through what other material – documents, artworks – might generate further meaning when placed in dialogue with the work. These processes ran alongside and overlapped. I labour this point to highlight that the final composition, like exhibitions in the main, is never as it is first imagined. It often contains unforeseen compromise, missteps and mistakes. Through this process of negotiating conceptual, intellectual and spatial concerns, the exhibition and what it transmits comes into being.

The above genealogy and conceptual and structural starting points of *Rewinding*, begins with the precursor *The Place Is Here* in terms of: 1) its chronological framing; 2) how the term 'New Internationalism' introduced in 1994 by many of the black artists and thinkers working in 1980s Britain informs *Rewinding* and 3) how *Rewinding* moves away from the framing of race and nation in *The Place Is Here*. L'Internationale's four-year programme 'Our Many Europes' offers a research frame to sit within and contribute towards, something the project also problematises in terms of

the confederation's evocation of a socialist history and the premise of 'our' Europes. The term 'rewinding' is acknowledged as rooted in Azoulay's use of the word to create a more dynamic relationship between the past and present and reconfigure understandings of seemingly accepted terms, such as internationalism. The chapter closes with a description of the exhibition methodology of working through commissions and collaborative research projects to realise its ideas, noting the pivotal role of scenographic principles developed with Simons. The exhibition as case study helps detail how its operations and processes inform its epistemological goals, foregrounding the underde-veloped discourse on such strategies and methods that interrelate exhibitions, research and the political in the chapter, 'Beyond Representing Ideology', which this submission as a whole seeks to address.

The Political Imaginary as Heuristic Device[1]

1   This chapter builds on the seminar 'Notes on the Political Imaginary and Exhibitions' I gave as part of Utrecht University's research group 'Transition in Motion' on 15 February 2023. The seminar began with an introduction and visit to Rewinding Internationalism followed by a talk whereby I introduced different uses of the political imaginary. See https://transmissioninmotion.sites.uu.nl/notes-on-the-political-imaginary-and-exhibitions-ohad-ben-shimon-and-nickaikens/#:~:text= The%20talk%20proposes%20that%20exhibition,understanding%20 of%20the%20political%20imaginary.

While not explicitly an investigation of the political imaginary, this inquiry is driven by a desire to find a vocabulary or set of concepts to articulate, in the sense of 'languaging', the relationship between the exhibition, research processes and the political. Placing a greater focus on the operational elements of exhibition making – from research to staging – does not downplay their onto-epistemological register, but underscores how both registers interact and inform one another.[2] An investigation into how this interconnection of exhibitions, research and the political as explored by others is the focus of the chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology'. This investigation runs in parallel to my own process of exhibition making with respect to '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations'. Identifying parallels with historical analysis from other fields has been an important step in naming types of analyses from other disciplines and how they resonate with form. As noted at the close of the chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology', these analyses do not accommodate the particularities of this inquiry's approach to exhibition making, and its spatial and sensorial affordances. The modes of analysis enumerated previously, also do not adequately address the role abstraction, or the nonrepresentational (including the spatial), might play in an exhibitionary process of inquiry that is non-declarative and that resists universalising claims. Turning to its potential uses, the political imaginary is here proposed as a heuristic device that offers a frame in which to consider the operational and onto-epistemological

together, placing these two registers in greater proximity and interaction (i.e., not as dichotomous).

The political imaginary circulates and has currency within the art system, and even though its use is highly variable it tends to point to the increased primacy of political engagement within artistic practices over the past four decades.[3] On a basic level the pairing of the political and imaginary offers a shorthand for how artists and exhibitions bring together imaginative and political tonalities. The term also resonates[2] with the more literary historiographies cited in 'Beyond Representing Ideology' such as the microhistory or critical fabulations. It aligns, too, with the imaginative scope of Ariella Aïsha Azoulay's potential history, one not realised but nevertheless possible. The political imaginary as a construct is compelling as it creates a space for engaging events, relations *and* ideologies. In other words, it moves across, or rather collapses, two registers: the intangible world of images and ideas and that of tangible actions and outcomes.

The following section turns to uses of the imaginary as it has emerged in sociology and anthropology over the last thirty years to understand the particular inflection of the 'political imaginary' and how it might inform this inquiry.[4] This tracing or 'mapping' of the imaginary is divided into four sections that relate to the core research task (investigating the relationship between exhibitions, processes of research and the political) as well as the specific frame of reference, *Rewinding Internationalism*. The first and largest part is given to concerns understanding the term and how it has been used, which also addresses the question of the imaginary, the symbolic and representation. The second looks to the relationship between the political imaginary and form. The third highlights how versions of

2   I use languaging here as Stuart Hall describes in introducing the two meanings of articulation: 'articulate means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. It carries that sense of languaging, expressing etc.' The second meaning is as a form of linkage that he uses as the basis for his theory of articulation. See Stuart Hall, interviewed by Lawrence Grossberg, 'On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall', Lawrence Grossberg (ed.), *Journal of Communication and Inquiry*, vol. 10, no. 2, June 1986, 45. I elaborate on this in my essay 'Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial', as part of the submission. I am not using the term as it has been used in language and translation studies with academics such as Merrill Swain and 'The Output Hypothesis' (2003) where she emphasises producing language, or 'languaging' for second language learning.

3   The example of documenta – the most visible of large-scale exhibitions – and how it became increasingly and overtly political from the 1990s onwards, is indicative of this trajectory.
4   I differentiate between 'use' and 'meanings'. My aim is not to fix its meaning, rather to understand and draw on its uses.

the imaginary have been used to understand the state, the conjuncture of the end of the Cold War and more recently processes of globalisation, all areas of focus in *Rewinding Internationalism*. The chapter aims to counter the predominantly European inflexion of the imaginary, looking, for example, to Edward Said's notion of 'imagined geography' or Arjun Appadurai's exploration of the imaginary in the era of globalisation. The fourth section, which ends the chapter, looks at how the political imaginary has been approached within the art system, with specific attention to curator and theorist Simon Sheikh and how he has applied the term in relation to the research exhibition.

The Political Imaginary and its Uses

The political imaginary draws primarily from socio-logical and anthropological literatures. The use of different qualifiers for forms of imaginaries have to a certain degree merged in recent years: social, technical and political. In a 2006 article Claudia Strauss already identified the widespread use of the term 'imaginaries' in anthropology, though as many writers have demonstrated, its genealogy goes back much further.[5] Strauss, like others, traces its use to Cornelius Castoriadis's *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1989[1975]), which is worth revisiting here. Castoriadis defines the imaginary as

> something ... 'invented' – whether this refers to sheer invention (a story entirely dreamed up), or a slippage, a shift of meaning in which available symbols are invested with other significations ... in both cases it is assumed that the imaginary is separate from the real, whether it claims to take the latter's place (a lie) or makes no such claim (a novel).[6]

Castoriadis sees each society (and his analysis is based solely on Western societies) as something that

is self-creating, non-essential, evolving, creating its own ontology. It is, Castoriadis argues, the collective – rather than the individual – that has the capacity to bring something new into being. This 'world-forming' as Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar describes it, 'and meaning-bestowing creative force' is possible because of 'the social imaginary of the instituting society'.[7] In other words, the imaginary here is not something separate from facts and events, but through its collective, *social* nature has the capacity to institute facts and events in the world.

Castoriadis argues that societies are filled with 'imaginary significations' that give rise to the social imaginary. These significations are not based entirely on image, or representation, 'they are of another nature'. Key to his conception of the social imaginary is its collective characteristic, that common signifiers exist for people in society but that there is no common 'signified'. These 'imaginary significations', however, do not operate in the role of fantasy, but serve to help society answer some of its most fundamental questions: 'Who are we as a collectivity? What do we want? What do we desire; what are we lacking?'[8] Here emerges the idea of the 'imaginary institution of society', whereby 'every human being defines himself or herself and is defined by others in relation to an "us"'.[9] For Castoriadis, we can say that the imaginary is a way of understanding social processes; it is an analytical device rather than something that is elective – one does not choose to adopt a particular imaginary society, it is something that is there, consti-tuting, and constitutive of, society itself. In this sense one could begin to think of mapping or exploring the different social imaginaries of particular societies or conjunctures: What would the social imaginary of 1930s Germany contain, for example, or 1848 across European revolutions?

5   See Claudia Strauss, 'The Imaginary', *Anthropological Theory*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2006, 322 – 44.
6   C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 127.

7   D. P. Gonakar, 'Towards New Imaginaries', 4.
8   C., *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 146 – 47.
9   *Ibid.*, 147 – 48.

Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities*, another key text cited in genealogies of the imaginary, comes after Castoriadis and differs substantially. Anderson's focus is on understanding the particular phenomenon of nationalism. The nation, Anderson suggests, is something 'imagined', in terms of the people who live there or the physical land of a country, rather than fully understood or comprehended. 'It is imagined', he writes, 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion'.[10] Similar to Castoriadis, however, is how Anderson's use of the imagined or the imaginary hinges on the use of symbols or what he calls 'cultural artefacts of a particular kind' and their potency within society. The symbolism of the nation, he argues, became particularly potent, in part due to the waning of the primacy of religion in Western societies during the Enlightenment. At the same time, the development and proliferation of specific tools played formative roles in creating what we might call nationalist imaginaries: the census, the map and the museum, which Anderson sees as 'the late colonial state's style of thinking about its domain'. As Anderson goes on 'the warp of this thinking was a totalizing classificatory grid, which could be applied with endless flexibility' to different areas of society but would ultimately lead to the adoption of different, nationalist self-understanding and differentiation.[11] Lastly, as Anderson repeatedly emphasises, nation, or nation-ness may be 'imagined', but it has been the basis for centuries of violence and war.

While Anderson examines the question of nationalism through the frame of colonialism and what Azoulay would call the 'imperial technologies' of census, map and museum, *Imagined Communities* like the *Imaginary Institution of Society* have been

rightly critiqued for the limited perspective of their positions. Gaonkar has recently outlined the 'staggering Eurocentricity' of Castoriadis's argument as well as its reluctance to acknowledge how societal change (and hence the social imaginary) are produced in specific, situated, local contexts.[12] A similar objection is made by Partha Chatterjee in relation to Anderson in her essay 'Whose Imagined Community?,[13] where she underscores how a generalised conception of 'imagined "communities"' does not allow space for specificity, particularity and difference.[14]

Modern Social Imaginaries by Charles Taylor is another text cited in the evolving concept of the imaginary that leans on Anderson's. Adamant to identify the partialness of his view, Taylor notes that he is looking specifically to the so-called 'West' rather than attempting a single (albeit partial) analysis applicable throughout the world. He arrives at the modern social imaginary to describe the development of modern Western societies and their evolving relationship to order. His 'basic hypothesis' is that 'central to Western modernity is a new conception of the moral order of society. This was first just an idea in the minds of some Influential thinkers, but it later claim to shape the social imaginary of large strata, and then eventually whole societies.' 'This mutation of this view of moral order into our social imaginary', he explains, 'is the coming to be of certain social forms which are those essentially characterising Western modernity: the market economy, the public sphere, and the self-governing people among others'.[15] While his focus never turns to the 'multiple modernities' in the world, he acknowledges that 'they need to be understood in terms of the

10   B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.
11   *Ibid*., 184.

12   D. P. Goankar, 'Towards New Imaginaries', 3.
13   P. Chatterjee, 'Whose Imagined Community', 14–225.
14   This critique is worth bearing in mind when thinking through the evocation of different political imaginaries in research-exhibition form and how the use of the microhistory, or 'critical fabulation' as methodologies might serve to counter universalising claims.
15   Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2003, 2.

divergent social imaginaries involved'.[16] Taylor's definition of a 'social imaginary' is as 'something deeper than the social schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode'. 'I am thinking, rather', he writes, 'of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows'. Taylor sums up by saying that 'the social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy'.[17]

Underpinning Castoriadis, Anderson and Taylor's notion of the imaginary is the relationship between the imagined and the real, which is not a binary that is collapsed into true and false. At the same time, all three positions identify the use of signs and symbols as central to the construction of imaginaries but that have tangible effects in the world in terms of the construction of identities, belief systems, etc. The imaginary as an analytical strategy is not something used solely to make sense of society. Rather it has a dual nature: it sits inside society, it helps form it. This duality, as explored in the next chapter, resonates with an interfacing between an exhibition, how it engages with a framework or area of study and how meaning comes into being through the exhibition's realisation. In this sense the imaginary sits in relation, but not in opposition, to ideology that might propose truths or systems to be enacted.[18] By contrast imaginaries are organic and malleable in nature.

Castoriadis, Anderson and Taylor all point to the role of symbols and signs in the construction of imaginaries, which in turn opens up the complex relationship between imaginaries and representation. Castoriadis lays the groundwork for this when he writes that

'everything presented to us in the social-historical world is inextricably tied to the symbolic', our understanding of every act, from war to child-bearing, is heavily dependent on symbols.[19] Yet there is an imaginary component to 'every symbol and of every act of symbolism' that requires we see something in a symbol that is not there. As he writes,

> to the extent that the imaginary ultimately stems from the originary faculty of positing or presenting oneself with things and relations that do not exist, *in the form of representation* (things and relations that are not or have never been given in perception), we shall speak of a final or radical imaginary as the common root of the actual imaginary and of the symbolic.

This, he concludes, is 'the elementary and irreducible capacity of evoking images'.[20] Castoriadis here specifically addresses art and its quality not as something that 'discovers', but that 'constitutes'; it brings something into being through an '"exceedingly complex relation" between what it "constitutes" and the real'. What is constituted precisely is left open by Castoriadis, and is simply defined as 'the new'.[21]

Addressing the role of the symbolic, it is important to turn to Jacques Lacan and the shift in frame of reference from societal process and analyses in psychoanalysis, from the 'social imaginary' to that that of the individual – even if Lacan's understanding of the subconscious is always *inter-subjective* or formed *in relation*.[22] Strauss summarises Lacan's treatment of the imaginary as *fantasy* formed in childhood, when one assumes an 'image'.[23] The use of imaginary, serves to 'obscure *the real*', what would be understood as an objective reality, an actual thing that underpins the symbolic register. The symbolic, for Lacan, is

16   *Ibid.*, 2.
17   *Ibid.*, 23.
18   This section draws on a series of unpublished notes on the political imaginary that Mick Wilson shared with me during our discussion on the term.

19   C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 117.
20   *Ibid.*, 127.
21   *Ibid.*, 133.
22   Castoriadis is a self-proclaimed anti-Lacanian but also uses a Lacanian element in his work.
23   C. Strauss, 'The Imaginary', 327.

differentiated from the imaginary and the real. This gap between what is imagined, projected and real opens up a generative space for thinking through the political imaginary. Particularly, as I shall look at in the following chapter, is the way Lacan's imaginary is vital to subject formation. The imaginary for Lacan, unlike Castoradis, is tied to the fantasies and fears of a single person, rather than a generalised notion of 'culture' or 'society'.[24] Thinking through the imaginary in relation to subjectivities or subject formation has a particular inflection within the context of exhibitions where different relations between subjectivities are at stake: constellations of artworks and archives, or the ways in which subjectivities encounter symbols, lead to the constitution of multiple political imaginaries.

For Anderson, the fundamental role of symbols and by inference representation is best summed up in the figure of the unknown soldier, 'no more arresting emblem of the modern culture of nationalism', or specifically the nationalist imaginary. 'Yet void as these tombs are of identifiable mortal remains or immortal souls, they are nonetheless saturated with ghostly *national* imaginings',[25] Anderson notes. While the political scientist and historian uses the example of the unknown soldier to highlight the reliance on death and affinities with religious imaginings, it is indicative of the imaginary's ambiguous relationship with both symbol and representation, for what the unknown soldier *stands in for* as much as how it is self-evidently *not real* or simply *unknown*.

In addressing the perceived 'staggering Eurocentricity' of Castoriadis, Anderson and Taylor, as well as considering the role of representation in relation to the imaginary, it is surprising that Said's conception of 'imaginative geography' is not given more prominence in accounts of the imaginary. Introducing the concept Said highlights the role of

the imagination in infusing objects and symbols with meaning. 'It is perfectly possible', he writes, 'to argue that some distinctive objects are made by the mind, and that these objects, while appearing to exist objectively, have only a fictional reality'. He uses the example of people marking a boundary or border to mark territory, with the area beyond the border being declared as the 'land of the barbarians'. 'In other words', he goes on, 'this universal practice of designation in one's mind of a familiar space which is "ours" and an unfamiliar space beyond "ours" which is "theirs" is a way of making geographical distinctions that can be entirely arbitrary'. As he concludes, 'all kinds of suppositions, associations and fictions appear to crowd the unfamiliar space outside one's own'.[26] On the one hand, Said's conception of the imaginary reinforces a dichotomy of real/true and imagined/false. Yet, in identifying that this 'imagined geography' is a central foundation on which the field of Orientalism is built, with its prejudices and assumptions, he points to the ways in which it takes hold across a vast range of studies, practices and policies that have underpinned relations between the 'West' and the Orient.[27] Said notes that the imagination inflects a sense of geography, and time. 'Much of what we associate with or even know about such periods as "long ago" or "in the beginning" or "at the end of time" is poetic – made up.' There is 'an imaginative, quasi-fictional quality one senses lurking in a time very different and distant from [ones] own'. In short 'there is no use in pretending that all we know about time and space, or rather history and geography, is more than anything else imaginative'. What Said is arguing is not that all geography and history is invented but rather that what he enticingly names 'imaginative knowledge' supplements what we know to be true about something, or 'what appears to be

24   *Ibid*, 328.
25   B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 9.

26   E. Said, *Orientalism*, 54.
27   Indeed we could look to terms such as the 'West' and the 'Global South' as being formed through Said's notion of an 'imagined geography'.

merely positive knowledge'.[28] Imaginative geography, for Said, allows projection, prejudice, categorisation and declaration to form.

Moving from this understanding of 'imaginative geography', Said describes it as a key for the ways in which Orientalism creates a vision of the Orient from Europe and casts it as other. He writes: 'Imaginative geography, from the vivid portraits to be found in *Inferno*, to the prosaic niches of d'Herberlot's *Bibliotheque Orientale*, legitimates a vocabulary, a universe *of representative* discourse to the discussion and the understanding of the Orient.'[29] For Said 'imagined geography' is central to how statements on the Orient are all 'declarative and self-evident; the tense they employ is the timeless eternal; they convey an impression of repetition and strength; they are always symmetrical to, and yet diametrically inferior to, a European equivalent, which is sometimes specified sometimes, not'.[30] For Said, therefore 'imaginative geography' is a form of what Denise Ferreira da Silva would describe as 'representational mechanisms' that are pronounced from a position of universalism and imbued with national and racial classifications.[31]

In his book *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of an Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*, Alex Lubin evokes the notion of a political imaginary in relation to Afro-Arab solidarity movements in the twentieth century. Inverting the imagined communities of Anderson, Lubin's project is 'interested in excavating the exiled and often hidden political consciousness that gets forged beyond – but as a result of – the development of modern nation states, particularly in the Modern Middle East'.[32] In a compelling study that, as discussed in the following chapter, opens up ways for thinking

internationalism as itself a political imaginary, it is here put forward as an emancipatory possibility and galvanising force. Central to Lubin's argument is the decolonial thinking of Walter Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano, with the former arguing for a 'decolonial imaginary' that 'exists in the uneven spaces – produced by race, economy and geopolitics – formed by colonial borders'.[33]

While Lubin does not himself offer a clear account or definition of the political imaginary, the writing of the preeminent decolonial thinker Quijano foregrounds the role of the imaginary in his dual concepts of coloniality and decoloniality. Charting the formation and imposition of a Eurocentred colonialism that was ushered in as a result of the fifteenth-century conquests, and led to its 'successor' Western imperialism, Quijanao emphasises how the categories of the 'racial', the 'ethnic', 'anthropological' or 'national' were 'intersubjective constructions, products of Eurocentred colonial domination that were even assumed to be "objective"'. As Quijano explains, the imposition of these categories is not only 'a matter of the subordination of the other cultures to the European', as Said so clearly maps out, it is to do with the 'colonization of the imagination of the dominated; that is, it acts in the interior of that imagination, in a sense it is part of it'.[34] For Quijano, as with other decolonial and anticolonial thinkers, the practice of coloniality, and hence decoloniality is a question of the imagination. If Quijano argues for how European colonisation represses 'modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives, images and systems of images, symbols, modes of signification', in other words all those things that are central to the construct of a social, political imaginary, Mignolo uses the specific term of 'the imaginary' in his development of his concept of European 'coloniality of knowledge'.[35] Mignolo cites the exploitation of

28 E. Said, *Orientalism*, 54.
29 *Ibid.*, 71.
30 *Ibid.*, 72.
31 Denise Ferreira da Silva, 'The Already Known'.
32 Alex Lubin, *Geographies of Liberation: The Making of An Afro-Arab Political Imaginary*, Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

33 *Ibid.*, 9.
34 Aníbal Quijana, 'Coloniality and Modernity/Rationality', *Cultural Studies*, vol. 21, no. 2 – 3, 2007, 169.
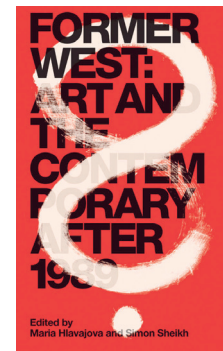35 W. Mignolo and C. Walsh (ed.), *On Decoloniality*, 195.

Africa through the slave trade as part of the 'Christian imaginary' before specifying the 'The Christian continental imaginary' as the 'necessary theological condition for the emergence of coloniality, and therefore of the colonial difference'.[36] Yet just as the imaginary is imposed, so too is it a space for the decolonial 'option' to emerge. Mignolo, Catherine Walsh, Maria Lugones and others see the possibilities for a decolonial imaginary, based on ideas of 'border thinking', of 'mestiza consciousness', that rejects the categorisations, and duality of colonial knowledge.[37]

The aim here is to signal the different ways the imaginary has been used, rather than to try and fix its meaning. It has been evoked as both a tool of oppression and emancipation, as a product of Orientalist, Eurocentric thinking and as a means to counter it. These different usages lend it utility within the context of this project while also indicating its limits as a conceptual or analytical framework. In fact, just as Said uses 'imaginative geography' to build a case for his critique of Orientalism, it can also be applied critically to many examples of exhibitions that have sought to group artists via nationality in an attempt to illustrate some binding characteristic among artists of a particular nation.[38] Such uses of 'imaginative geography' in exhibition practices came to prominence in Europe in the 1990s as institutions

made the first attempts to address the limitations of Western European-US-centred conceptions of art.[39] They are evidenced in the many files of the Gate Foundation archive – the starting point for susan pui san lok's *REWIND / REPLAY* – with exhibitions such as *Indian Contemporary Art* (1990) or *Modern Indonesian Painting* (1993). In the contemporary art system we could look to projects such as the multi-year 'FORMER WEST' as another way in which an 'imagined geography' has been mobilised, here as a mechanism to invert Western-centred positions.[40] By proposing the 'West' as 'former' the project inscribes a geopolitical and cultural space, of the West, an 'imagined geography', while simultaneously signalling its status as something that is superseded, transformed, or simply ended, evoking what Said would call an 'imagined' temporality. Indeed, as I shall go on to discuss in the following chapter there are elements of an 'imagined geography', an 'imagined' history that underpin internationalism, where we relate to different contexts, times and political projects through *the idea* of something rather than grounding it in any factual or lived experience.

36 *Ibid.*, 195.
37 The idea of border thinking and Mestiza Double Consciousness is introduced in relation to decolonial thinking specifically in Maria Lugones's close reading of Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands* (1987). See Maria Lugones, 'On Borderlands/La Frontera: An Interpretive Essay', *Hypatia*, vol. 7, no. 4, special issue, *Lesbian Philosophy*, Autumn 1992, 31–37. See also Walter Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova, 'Theorizing from the Borders: Shifting to Geo- and Body-Politics of Knowledge', European Journal of Social Theory, vol. 9, no. 2, 205–21. Key ideas and concepts of decoloniality have been introduced to me through the Maria Lugones Summer School, hosted by the Van Abbemuseum since 2020 of which I have been a faculty member. I have held seminars on the work of Rasheed Araeen offering close readings of his work in the collection as well as his seminal 1975 text 'Preliminary Notes Towards a Black Manifesto', *Making Myself Visible*, London: Kala Press, 1984, 7–97.
38 This critique can also be levelled at *The Place Is Here* or how the publication is framed with its subheading 'The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain'.

39 This is perhaps most noticeable with the large volume of exhibitions on 'Eastern European' artists following the end of the Soviet Union. A number of the exhibitions are discussed in the section with texts by Claire Bishop, Christian Rattemeyer and Dan Perjovschi with Roxana Marcoci, 'Exhibiting the "East" since 1989', in Ana Janevski and Roxana Marcoci with Nouril Ksenia (ed.), *Art and Theory of Post-1989 Central and Eastern Europe: A Critical Anthology*, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2018, 67–78.
40 FORMER WEST is a long-term research project that ran from 2008–16 comprising conferences, exhibitions and a large edited volume lead by BAK, basis voor actuele kunst in Utrecht, the Netherlands. It describes its remit as follows: 'The project grapples with the repercussions of the political, cultural, and economic events of 1989 for the contemporary condition. It does so in the search for ways of *formerizing* the persistently hegemonic conjuncture that is "the West"; to be able instead to simply refer to "the west," and with it, suggest the possibility of producing new constellations, another world, other worldings.' It even describes 'former West' as a 'propositional imaginary as a device to "assess the contemporary"'. A full archive of the project can be found at https://formerwest.org/Front. See also Maria Hlavajova and Simon Sheikh (ed.), *Former West: Art and the Contemporary After 1989*, Utrecht and Cambridge, MA: BAK, basis voor actuele kunst and MIT Press, 2016.

The Political Imaginary and Form

Political theorist Marc Neocleous and cultural scholar Susan Buck-Morss address the question of form and representation in relation to the political imaginary. Buck-Morss writes in relation to the 'passing' of the 'dreamworlds' of really existing socialism after the fall of the Soviet Union.[41] She is one of the few writers to address the *political* imaginary specifically rather than the imaginary or the imaginative more broadly. Buck-Morss looks to the construct of *politischeskoe voobrazhaemoe* as formulated by the Russian philosopher Valerïï Podoroga and, as she tells us, expanded upon in the work of Elena Petrovskaia.[42] She writes: 'in the Russian language the concept takes on a representational concreteness lacking in contemporary Western discussions.' She goes on to note that '*Obraz* signifies "form" or "shape" as a graphic representation and is used to mean "icon". *Politischeskoe voobrazhaemoe* is thus a topographical concept in the strict sense, not a political logic but a political landscape, a concrete visual field in which political actors are positioned'.[43] The different uses of the term outlined above clearly counter Buck-Morss's characterisation of the 'Western discussion' on the political imaginary as being 'little more than the logic of discourse or world view' at the expense of a relationship with imagery or representation. Yet the idea of a topology or landscape within which actors, contexts and references are positioned offers a more varied, multiple understanding of the imaginary, as opposed to focusing on how a single sign or symbol produces a nationalist imaginary, for example. Rather than using an image of a flag, or a single monument, a political imaginary as landscape, within which different types of terrains, some abstracted, some concrete, starts to offer a way in which we might

understand exhibitions and their engagement with processes of research and the political.

The Political Imaginary and the Conjuncture of the 1990s

In much of the discourse cited here the imaginary is a device through which to describe and analyse societal and political processes. Taylor and Buck-Morss employ the political imaginary to analyse the changes ushered in by the end of the Cold War. Taylor is writing in the 1990s and his term 'modern social imaginaries' tracks 'the forms of social imaginary that have underpinned the rise of Western modernity'.[44] Unlike Anderson, Taylor is focused on the 'local particularities' of these social imaginaries that he sees as supporting rather than hindering a project to 'provincialise Europe'.[45] Buck-Morss draws on the 'landscape' of the political imaginary 'to come to terms with mass dreamworlds at the moment of their passing'. Her starting point is the end of the Cold War – its 'profound significance', she says, 'not so much in its political effects – the replacement of "really existing" (capitalist) democracy – as the fact that this fundamental shift in the historical map shattered an entire conception of the world on both sides'.[46]

Appadurai has updated the concept of the imaginary within the context of globalisation. The sociologist sees 'a new role for the imagination in social life'. In order to understand this, he writes that 'we need to bring together the old idea of images, especially mechanically produced images (in the Frankfurt school sense), the idea of the imagined community (in Anderson's sense); and the French idea of the

41   Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe: The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002.
42   *Ibid.*, 11.
43   *Ibid.*, 12.

44   C. Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2.
45   The final chapter of Taylor's book borrows its title from Dipesh Chakrabarty's key publication *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (2000). In the chapter Taylor makes a case for the European history he has described as being 'one model among many'. *Ibid.*, 196.
46   S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, X.

imaginary (*imaginaire*) as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations'. He continues:

> the image, the imagined, the imaginary – these are all terms that direct us to something critical and new in global cultural processes: *the imagination as a social practice*. ... [T]he imagination has become an organised field of social practices, a form of work (in both the sense of labour and culturally organised practices) and a form of negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globalised fields of possibility.[47]

Appadurai's specific contribution to discourse on the imaginary is in how he describes it as 'extending Benedict Andreson's' notion of imagined communities to 'imagined worlds, that is, the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the globe'.[48] Appadurai describes the 'complexity of the current global economy' and the 'disjunctures between economy, culture and politics that we have only begun to theorize' through a selection of 'scapes': *ethnoscapes*, *mediascapes*, *technoscapes*, *financespaces* and *ideoscapes*. Echoing Buck-Morss's emphasis on form, he says that the 'suffix -scape allows us to point to the fluid irregular shapes of these landscapes'. Interestingly, he expands on this by noting that the use of -scape 'indicates that these are not objectively given relations that look the same from every angle of vision, but rather they are deeply perspectival constructs inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors'.[49] The following chapter explores Appadurai's address of the 'imagined worlds' within the context of globalisation and his emphasis on the presence and relations of different 'scapes' that offer entry points to access, understand and think with the political imaginaries at work in *Rewinding Internationalism*.

Writing in 2003, after Buck-Morss and directly quoting her emphasis on the 'landscape' of the political imaginary, Neocleous emphasises how this 'visual field and political landscape has been dominated by the image of the state'.[50] He sees what he describes as a 'statist political imaginary' whereby 'real societies develop under the protective shadow of the state' as inextricably linked to modernity, so much so that 'much of how we think is shaped by it'.[51] His argument is compelling for its ties to the political imaginary and its 'contours' as constructing the state. He details the ways in which the imagination has been central to political thought since the pamphlet wars of the late eighteenth-century and are connected to a wide range of political thought.[52] The idea of the statist imaginary is not wedded to one worldview or political system, but, like Anderson's notion of nationalism or Ernesto Laclau's description of populism, it is picked up and used in different ways depending on how it is articulated.

Returning to articulation, where this inquiry tentatively started, it is worth noting Hall's engagement with the imaginary or the political imagination. Writing in the wake of Margaret Thatcher's electoral victory in Britain in 1987, securing her a third term, he described the ways in which 'the electorate is thinking politically not in terms of policies but of images. This doesn't mean that policies don't matter. It does mean that policies don't capture people's *political imaginations* unless constructed into an image with which they can identify.' As he concludes: 'The future has to be imagined – "imaged", to coin a

47 Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 31.
48 *Ibid.*, 33.
49 *Ibid.*

50 Mark Neocleous, *Imaging the State*, Maidenhead and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003, 2.
51 *Ibid.*, 2.
52 In his introduction Neocleous cites reference to the writings of the 'moral imagination' in Edmund Burke. He writes: 'If we look back over some of the major debates from 200 years before, for example, we find that Edmund Burke's attack on the French revolutionaries is shot through with assumptions about the importance of the "moral imagination" which covers "the defects of our naked shivering nature", the way "acts of rapacious despotism present themselves to [our] imagination"'. *Ibid.*, 3.

word'.[53] Hall sees this not as a trivial question of marketing or branding but rather a complex field where questions of ideology and representation are at stake and where the process of 'imaging' can contribute to the building of new forms of hegemony. Significantly, as Hall laments, this understanding and mobilisation of the 'political imagination' was well understood by Thatcher and what Hall describes as the 'Great Moving Right Show'.

The Political Imaginary in the Exhibition

So far this chapter charts versions of the imaginary and usages contemporaneous with the focus of *Rewinding Internationalism*: the 1990s, the end of the Cold War, globalisation and a reconsideration of the state. This account is by no means comprehensive and has not addressed the many types that Claudia Strauss identifies as proliferating within the humanities.[54] The remaining part of this chapter considers the varied use of the political imaginary as has been discussed in relation to contemporary art exhibitions. In the issue of *Vector – critical research in context* titled 'Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination',[55] already cited (in which my essay 'Approaching research – exhibition practices' appears) the editors Cătălin Gheorghe and Mick Wilson give a compressed account of the usages and slippages of the term within the contemporary art system. They cite Mark Fisher's 'capitalist realism' as a political imaginary that locked in capitalism 'as the only viable political and economic system' and through its stranglehold had made it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism itself.[56]

The editors mark out how uses of imaginaries are applied to all sections of society: 'imaginative work then undergirds the possibility of a whole range of collective projects from nation-building, profit seeking, public health and ecological protection to internationalisation, unionisation, and the mobilisation of forms of sexual and racial dissidence'.[57] They situate the turn to an engagement with, or exploration of, political imaginaries as a move towards world making within artistic practice. This capacity is mobilised, they suggest, due to the conjuncture of social, political, biopolitical and ecological crises and the ways in which 'unbounded economic domination and the rampant violence of dispossession have transformed social relations, producing new political desires that cannot find articulation within established paradigms of political participation'. As they write: 'For some this renewal of the political imaginary is nothing short of the demand for a radical pluralisation of cosmologies, a multiplication of world-visions and an ethics and practice of care that seeks imaginative modalities of pluriversal world-making.'[58] Here, the editors see a possibility for exhibitions to contribute to 'acts of political imagination'. They continue: 'If the exhibition is seen as a realisation of an act of knowing otherwise, as an act of performative imagination, it can also be seen to function as a form of critique in relation to actuality.' In other words, the 'world-making' of the imaginary, as rehearsed within exhibitions, 'offers both a critique of the status quo and a proposition of better worlds to come'.[59]

Simon Sheikh's PhD thesis 'Exhibition-Making and the Political Imaginary: On Modalities and Potentialities of Curatorial Practice' appears to be the most direct address of the political imaginary and in many respects, is closely aligned with the terms of my own research project. Indeed, one chapter of his thesis

53   Stuart Hall, 'Blue election, Election Blues', *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left*, London: Verso Books, 2020[1988], https://www.versobooks.com/en-gb/blogs/news/4854-blue-election-election-blues.
54   C. Strauss, 'The Imaginary', 322–44.
55   C. Gheorghe and M. Wilson (ed.), *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*.
56   Mark Fisher, *Capitalist Realism: Is there no Alternative?*, London: Zero Books, 2012, 2 and *ibid.,* 8.

57   C. Gheorghe and M. Wilson (ed.), Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination., 9.
58   *Ibid.*, 9.
59   *Ibid*, 10.

looks to 'articulation', though for Sheikh this is not framed through theories of articulation as practised in cultural studies, and rather through its more discursive sense of 'the formulation of your position and politics of aesthetics'.[60] Resonating with Joshua Simon's notion of the cosmogram, the focus of Sheikh's project circles around 'concepts of exhibition making and how they construct a certain horizon, a certain micro cosmos of the possible through rhetoric in both language and visual representation as a language'.[61] Sheikh turns to the 'political imaginaries' in the final section of the thesis describing them as 'ideas of the world and society, its past and present, but also its possible futures'. Sheikh's accessing of the political imaginary is based almost exclusively on Castoriadis and his understanding of the imaginary as a 'web of meanings he calls social imaginary'. Identifying the slippage in Castoriadis's relationship to significations and references to the 'real' or 'rational' he concludes that: 'In this sense we can see both aesthetic and political images as imaginary significations, as creation, but also as inherently social and shared.'[62] Sheikh is drawn to Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary as self-instituting, which he mobilises in relation to artistic practice and exhibitions. 'There is', he says, 'no society that cannot imagine itself' and that this self-instituting takes place through 'radical imagination'.[63] In other words, through Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary, Sheikh imparts an agency to the political imaginary of exhibitions.

Sheikh's exploration of the concept moves swiftly from emphasising its role in 'autonomous' societies that oppose imposed hegemonic systems ('such as God, tradition, progress, historical necessity and so on') to proposing that the social imaginary might be a device to resist the 'historically inevitable category'

of 'the marriage of free market capitalism and liberal democracy'. Underpinning Sheikh's argument then is the wider assertion that we have lost the capacity for a 'political imaginary'. Castoriadis is evoked to both show societies 'self-instituting' through the use of imaginaries and, subsequently, a contemporary inability to form a common imaginary – due to the inevitability of neoliberalism's 'end of history'. Sheikh's thesis shifts from the construct of the political imaginary to the horizon, using the latter as both synonymous with the former (what he describes as a connection between aesthetics and politics), but also as an imaginary in itself, a signifier for a place and time to come.[64] In arguing for the diminishing and subsequent need to reclaim a political horizon, the focus of Sheikh's thesis is firmly situated in a wider critique of neoliberal, free market capitalism and neoconservatism. The role of the exhibition he suggests can be as 'a passage to a new space of experience, where a new horizon becomes visible'.[65]

I share Sheikh's belief in art and exhibitions to put forward models, imagined possibilities, horizons of a more just, equitable world. Where I struggle to grasp Sheikh's use of the political imaginary in his doctoral project is the way that it is transposed onto the metaphor of the horizon, which serves to offer a representation of a future to come.[66] As pointed to earlier, there is an unresolved relationship between the symbolic, as it appears in how the political imaginary is used, and how representation or a representative act might stifle exhibitionary processes of research invested in the political. Equally, as the different uses of the imaginary outlined above make clear, it feels limiting to transpose its meaning(s) onto a single image.

60 Simon Sheikh, 'Exhibition-Making and the Political Imaginary: On Modalities and Potentialities of Curatorial Practice', Lund University, 2012, 22.
61 Ibid., 24
62 Ibid., 206
63 Ibid.

64 This is detailed specifically in the chapter 'Horizonality', 205–18.
65 Ibid., 217.
66 Sheikh's more recent writing on the curatorial moves away from this argument. See, for example, his text 'Morbid Symptoms: Curating in Times of Uncertainty and Deglobalization. An Introduction' in Curating After the Global, 25–30 or his notion of 'depresentation', which is put forward in his essay 'The Problem is not to make Political Exhibitions but to make Exhibitions Politically!', in Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination, 80–87.

Political imaginaries are not inherently emancipatory, egalitarian or even future facing. Neoliberalism, even the concept of the 'end of history' is a form of imaginary itself, with its own sets of symbols and associations. Its complexity lies precisely in how it has been produced and mobilised for different ends. Indeed, this malleability is useful when approaching exhibitions, where different worldviews, imaginaries, symbols and forms of engagement with representation are in relation. In this sense, rather than proposing equivalence between the political imaginary and the exhibition, this inquiry is a more modest exploration of how the uses of the political imaginary might lend insights to the relationship between exhibitions, processes of research and the political. The political imaginary in this project is not a resolved, wrapped up concept or analytical system that can then be applied wholesale to research-exhibition practices. Rather, through understanding approaches to, genealogies of, and applications of the political imaginary, it can serve as a heuristic device that allows one to think with exhibitions.

Buck-Morss's 'terrain' of the political imaginary becomes a way to approach the *form* and *spatiality* of political imaginaries in exhibitions; Castoriadis's instituting of the social imaginary permits a reading of the political imaginary in exhibitions that produce agency, and the use of the imaginary in relation to shifting understandings of the state in the context of globalisation becomes a lens through which to *reimagine* internationalism. In other words, these uses create a frame, or even a landscape itself, to consider the onto-epistemological and operational registers that do not exclude the others but are in relation. Importantly, the political imaginary is purposed as a heuristic device: while it offers a frame to think the different register of exhibitions together, it has limits as a construct and with respect to exhibitions. The project picks up uses of the imaginary to 'shake them off' as Hall would say, to keep focus with a set of images, configurations

of display structures in a gallery, sound and lighting conditions of video works next to archival vitrines, how people move through galleries, etc. – that which is specific to the conditions of exhibitions.

This chapter looks to genealogies and uses of the political imaginary from anthropology and social science to its circulation within the art system, stressing its heuristic use in exhibition making to provide a lens on the relations of exhibition making, research processes and questions of the political. Contributing to an understanding of an exhibition's onto-epistemological capacity, and accommodating form (or 'terrain' and 'scapes'), the political imaginary takes account of analytical *and* formal or spatial characteristics that go further than the use of conjunctural analysis, the microhistory or the evocation of a potential history, for example, as presented in 'Beyond Representing Ideology'. The next chapter, 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*', draws on uses of the political imaginary as analytic in relation to shifting concepts of the national and international in the 1990s, instituting, and modes of 'scaping'. Going beyond conjunctural analysis, or historiographic method (e.g., microhistory), the political imaginary can encompass questions of form and space. It thereby becomes a terrain (both conceptual and spatial) to address the relationship between exhibitions, research processes and the political. Specifically, it offers up a device to think through the operations of the exhibition (and its instantiation in space) as intersecting and informing its epistemological potential.

A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*

This chapter walks us through the exhibition and brings all the themes of the research into play. Therefore, it may be useful to reprise the material covered elsewhere in the text before outlining this pivotal chapter's structure and agenda. The four chapters of this research overview approach the research task from different perspectives. 'Beyond Representing Ideology' places the project within discourse on the curatorial. The aim there is to show how existing discourse often foregrounds epistemological claims over the operations of exhibition, while not naming how particular exhibition practices approach or operate as research. It introduces strategies of historical analysis to identify means of exploring the relationship between exhibition, processes of research and the political, the core research task of this project. The chapter closes with recognising that these devices, while useful in naming strategies, have clear limits in addressing some specific operations of exhibitions – namely as spatial and sensorial encounters. '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations' turns to the occasion of the exhibition – the central contribution to this project – to address this imbalance. It introduces the different starting points, before describing methodologies, and the role of scenography in the exhibition. In this respect it places discursive, methodological and formal/spatial processes alongside each other and as mutually informative. 'The Political Imaginary' maps the terrain of this term, introducing it as a heuristic device that can help navigate the relationship between exhibitions, research and the political. The chapter emphasises its different uses, presenting the construct as a scaffolding of ideas. The chapter likewise suggests that the political imaginary offers helpful insights through its use as a terrain, -scape, analytic device and capacity to institute. It can accommodate – while not fully resolving – both onto-epistemological and operational registers of exhibitions while being contemporaneous

and in dialogue with the temporal and sociopolitical context of *Rewinding Internationalism*.

This chapter now takes readers into the exhibition to focus on its spatial instantiation and operations – the sequencing of rooms, scenography and visitor experience of as they move among visual and sonic environments. The purpose is to stress how these operational elements are central to the exhibition as a site of inquiry. At certain moments it picks up uses of the political imaginary to illuminate that relationship, a device that also aids the core research task noted above. The political imaginary is not an object of study here, but its uses and projections encourage an engagement with the temporal and sociopolitical frame of *Rewinding Internationalism*. Susan Buck-Morss's description of the beginning of the 1990s as the *passing* of 'dreamworlds and catastrophes' casts the fragmentary, spectral nature of the exhibition in a new light. Internationalism itself is a form of political, even geographical and temporal, imaginary that has underpinned diverse political and social projects. Lastly, the exhibition can offer insights into the political imaginary – for example, how it functions as both analytic device *and* instituting process.

The Van Abbemuseum iteration is outlined in order to describe the exhibition to the reader, centring the operations, and accompanied by a close reading of the exhibition via observations from the artist Céline Condorelli produced while moving through the exhibition itself. As I write in my text on Yael David's exhibition, this analogy with textual close reading is the most affective way to attend to the physical, material and audio-visual specificities of the exhibition, whether with respect to a single piece, a component in the gallery or a whole show. The mode of close reading is rarely used in supporting declarations on the curatorial and exhibition, indicating the manner in which the operational register is played down. In what follows, Buck-Morss's analogy of the political imaginary as a terrain is a prompt

to describe the rooms, architecture and 'contours' of the galleries in tandem with the ideas or histories that come into view.

Walking through *Rewinding Internationalism* different types of aesthetic, spatial and experiential operations unfold. In one of the three possible 'entrance rooms' there is a selection of material chosen by Paulina Varas, relating to the context of Chile in the 1990s. Modular structures, made from dark metal and pre-coloured MDF in two different shades of grey show photographs of the collective CADA, and individual works by artists Lotty Rosenfeld and Diamela Eltit, mainly from the 1970s and all associated with the journal *Revista de Crítica Cultural*, issues of which are shown in a vitrine in the centre of the room. In one corner the frenetic diagrams of Miguel D. Norambuena, teaching devices written in felt-tip pen to explain the concept of ecosophy, and central to Félix Guattari's 'Three Ecologies', the lecture he delivered when visiting Chile in 1992, are pinned, unframed to the wall. In the opposite corner a large freestanding monitor shows *MEMORY RE-EDITED, from Beijing in 1995 to Santiago de Chile 2022* (2022) Cecilia Barriga's film commissioned for the exhibition, telling the story of thirty years of internationalist feminist struggle through recordings of gatherings in conference halls and on the streets. Through these three 'nodes' as Varas refers to them – Guattari's 'three ecologies' (ideas), the journal and international feminisms (dispositifs) and the democratic transition (political projects) – visitors can piece together a constellation of materials: the large painting *La XXII Historia del Rostro (Trueque)* (1998) by Eugenio Dittborn hanging on the same grey MDF as the modules and metal stud structure; an issue of the journal with a reproduction of Dittborn's work; Norambuena's diagrams where three interlocking circles constitute a Venn diagram projected onto the floor in reference to the 'Three Ecologies'; another issue of the journal open to an interview with Guattari,

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Cecilia Barriga, CADA (Colectivo de Acciones de Arte), Eugenio Dittborn and issues of *Revisita de Crítica Cultural*, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Cecilia Barriga, CADA (Colectivo de Acciones de Arte), Eugenio Dittborn and issues of *Revisita de Crítica Cultural*, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Diamela Eltit and Lotty Rosenfeld (above) and Cecilia Barriga, CADA (Colectivo de Acciones de Arte) and susan pui san lok/lok pui san (below), Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

signalling his significance to a group of artists and thinkers in the 1990s.

This room also introduces some of the key scenographic principles in the exhibition. In the centre are the metal modules that reappear throughout the galleries; Condorelli reads the 'raw steel framework' of the modular system as a 'specific aesthetics of the 90s' observing that 'these colourless systems of the 90s … [try] to produce open structures and to expose how they are made, not within a modernist language'.[1] As noted above, the Dittborn painting hangs on grey panels on top of metal studs. Seeing the structures Condorelli recalls architect Cedric Price and 'putting on display the means to make something'.[2] While she is right – the scenography is modular, with a 90s aesthetic, the scenographer Natascha Leonie Simons and I never thought about an aesthetic language of the decade. We had thought through a scenographic language that would evoke form taking shape, some-thing being put together and composed to create a proposition: the exhibition as research process, the working through of an idea; and the construct of internationalism.

What emerges in this room through the interplay of scenography and material is a 'production-analysis' identified in 'Beyond Representing Ideology'. It is an interplay of presentation frames of reference and the forms of that analysis, an *evocation* through the spatial, scenographic and material choices in the room. Varas offers a conjunctural analysis of the 1990s in Chile through the three aforementioned nodes. She 'maps the context' at the end of the Pinochet dictatorship, through the journal's revisiting of CADA's street inter-ventions and happenings as public forms of resistance that could inform the democratic 'transition' in Chile, and that resonates today as the country embarks on

1   Recorded, unpublished conversation with Celine Condorelli, Van Abbemuseum, February 2023. All subsequent quotations from Condorelli are taken from this conversation.
2   *Ibid.*

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rewriting of its constitution.[3] There is an analysis of the relevance of the 'Three Ecologies' for a group of intellectuals and artists, evidenced in the philosopher's own contribution to *Revista*. And the chronicling of internationalist feminisms, from the 1990s until today, points to the trajectory and ongoing relevance of feminist thought and networks of solidarity. In all instances the conjuncture of the 1990s, as Azoulay would argue is 'not closed off'; rather it moves from the 1970s until the present. The analysis takes place through the registers of documentary, photographs, a painting, pedagogy and video. The varying scale of images, needing to walk around the modular structure, lean over the vitrines to look at journals, sit down on the bench to watch Barriga's film, asks for varied physical movement and concentration with which the viewer is invited to analyse.

Visitors enter the room by walking over interlocking circles of the unmarked, unexplained Venn diagram.[4] The greyscale across the MDF panelling of the modular structures convey construction, systems thinking. Concepts are instantiated without being explained. The scenography initiates a set of associations that, when experienced in tandem with the frames and forms of the analytic work, fold together that which is being referred to and that which is being proposed or imagined. While this takes place within the space of a single gallery, the back and forth between evoca-

3   At the time of writing Chile was in the process of writing a second draft of a new constitution, having rejected a first draft in October 2022. The process, initiated by President Gabriel Boric was undertaken following a referendum to replace the constitution written in 1980 during the Pinochet government. The first constitution, largely viewed as progressive in its emphasis on gender, indigenous and ecological rights, was rejected by over 60 per cent of the electorate. For a summary see Sergio Verdugo, 'Chile's New Constitutional Proposal: A Balance Between Change and Continuity', ConstitutionNet, 30 June 2023, https://constitutionnet.org/news/chiles-new-constitutional-proposal-balance-between-change-and-continuity.

4   In a conversation with the museum guides multiple readings of these circles were offered. Some saw it as an aesthetics of analysis, others saw the circles in red, green and blue as the RGB colours generated on early television sets, still others saw it as echoing Miguel D. Norambuena's diagrams.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with diagrams by Miguel Denis Norambuena and photographs of Felix Guattari's visit to Chile, Van Abbemuseum, 2022–23

tion and reference is repeated across the exhibition. *Compositionally*, this creates a rhythm at the level of attention and scale. Visitors are not overburdened with large quantities of archival reproductions or documentation, or what Claire Bishop would describe as the aesthetics of 'research-based art'.[5] Instead, through bringing together varying spatial, visual and sonic registers, they are invited to experience rather than to read the exhibition.

Moving from the more overtly analytical aesthetic of this room into the single sound and video installation of susan pui san lok's *REWIND/REPLAY*, visitors are met with a different aesthetic language, scale and mode of engagement. The main components of the work – an oval carpet, music stands and hanging microphones, projection screens opened at varying heights with images spilling onto the walls – were kept from the Netwerk Alast iteration. The hanging magnetic tape, however, appears here in long rectangular vertical sections at different lengths, like curtains, and to the five-part script pui san lok has added a second five-part sequence, sampling recordings of symposia, workshops and seminars in the archive. The voices, overlaying one another at various degrees of audibility are (as the exhibition guide explains) those of curators, art historians and academics active in the 1990s and presumably speaking at recorded events run by the Gate Foundation. In one sequence pui san lok edits together all the sounds of, predominantly men, stuttering through moments in sentences ('well, mmmm, mmmm, you see, mmmm, well, yes'), clearly struggling to find their words when articulating their position on areas that they deem 'sensitive' to their audience. The sense across the room – of both performed script and sampled archive – of dancing, pixelated images, and the physical remnants of a technologically obsolete archive, is of meaning, or the archive itself, being unravelled and restaged in abstracted form.

5   C. Bishop, 'Information Overload'.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of *REWIND/REPLAY* (2023), susan pui san lok / lok pui san,
Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

It's important to emphasise the sensorial conditions of 'not knowing' what you're listening to in the exhibition. In contrast to the diagrammatic, documentary, modular aesthetic of the preceding room, visitors to this room need to listen attentively to hear the voices emanating from the ceiling, to walk through the seaweed-like curtains, shimmering in the light, to come across a script that, split into ten parts, is not decipherable as a singular narrative. This space works through association and evocation, the opposite of an 'aesthetics of research'. We are invited to imagine the performers, the material that was once on the streams of magnetic tape. Experienced after, and sometimes before the more overt analytics of Varas's presentation there is a further interfacing between observation and evocation.

This analysis of these two rooms points to a type of work (analytical, evocative) that resonates with the different uses of the political imaginary that similarly operate on a similar plane, or with a similar flexibility of purpose – both as something that can be analysed (the nationalist imaginary, imagined geography, etc.), but also as something that is operative in society, that holds agency and creates meaning. Walter Mignolo's outlining of the decolonial imaginary looks at the ways in which European thought has colonised the imagination, while creating the possibilities for a decolonial 'option' to emerge. In this sense the political imaginary is something one can look at, read and apprehend from a distance and be within, part of. In the exhibition the analytical and subjective interfaces with affective experience, whereby viewers engage with material pointing to events, facts in the world and also have space, sound, light, etc. act upon them. This combination of analysis and affect produces *something* – what Irit Rogoff would call an *event of knowledge* in relation to the curatorial, but which here takes place through the spatial, sensorial condition of the exhibition. This *something* cannot be done through the methodologies proposed in chapter one: conjunctural analysis, microhistories, critical fabulations, etc. It requires

spatial, formal, experiential choices that are specific to exhibition making. This underscores the limitations of a reading of exhibitions in relation to theories of articulation. For example, the momentary connections of internationalist feminism with the scrambling of the Gate Foundation archive create intersections that seek to transcend gender and nation. Yet their articulation remains a discursive proposition. What interests me is the type of analysis-evocation that emerges at the intersection of feminist and 'unknown' knowledges when one sits watching Barriga's film and the alternating lights of *REWIND/REPLAY* appear in your peripheral vision, or you hear the ironic refrain of 'he's so clever' said over and over as you walk into *REWIND/REPLAY* having listened to the powerful voices of women speaking at assemblies in the street of Mexico City vehemently denouncing patriarchal knowledge. These associations, both discursive and sensorial, get the viewer's imaginary to work.

Turn right through *REWIND/REPLAY* and you encounter a series of photographs of abandoned industrial spaces with unmanned factory equipment. The images are presented on another freestanding wall made of exposed metal stud and grey MDF panel, the same used for Dittborn's *La XXII Historia del Rostro (Trueque)*. The images, we learn from the captions, are of Philips factories in the 1990s, when the company moved production from Eindhoven, where it was founded in 1891, outside Europe. Walk around the structure and you enter a space within a space showing Allan Sekula's *Waiting for Tear Gas (black globe to white)* (1999 – 2000). The work is an analogue slide show of eighty-one images shot at the anti-IMF protests in Seattle in 1999. Sekula's images, beautifully described in Pablo Martínez's essay in the *Rewinding Internationalism* publication, capture bodies, the multitude, shouting, close together.[6] Walk

6   Pablo Martinez, 'Wating for Teargas', 57 – 64.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of *REWIND/REPLAY* (2023), susan pui san lok/lok pui san,
Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Norbert van Onna, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation views with works by Norbert van Onna and the archive of ADN
(Association pour la Démocratie à Nice), Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

out and turn left and on the back of the structure is a huge array of photographs and archival material. The scenes of protest, carnival, reproductions of open letters printed in the press, tell the story of the Association pour la démocratie á Nice (AdN), founded in 1991 as a response to the candidature of Jean-Marie Le Pen, then leader of the far right National Front, in the regional elections, and independent carnivals in Nice.[7] One of the earliest documents is an open letter published in *Nice-Matin*, the local paper instructing people to vote against Le Pen and what they saw as the anti-migrant hatred (*la haine*) National Front was perpetuating. Within the exhibition, the story of AdN and Nice is a microhistory that speaks to the rise of nationalisms and xenophobia in Europe in the 1990s. It is a microhistory that was extended substantially in the exhibition at Villa Arson in Nice. Similarly, the images of anti-EU and anti-globalisation protests point to the political dynamic of the conjuncture of the 1990s when anti-globalisation movements were aligned with an anti-nationalist position that included the fight for climate justice, LGBTQ rights and fair treatment of migrants. They allude to a legacy of the workers' movements, for whom the idea of internationalism was foundational. What permeates this room, as Condorelli keenly observes, is 'extreme social unrest but with a sense of hope that things could change because they weren't set in stone yet'. The images of empty factories, of crowds in the streets, of the energy of the multitude are 'not particularly beautiful per se, *except for their promises*'. They point to a 'political potential of what could have come', or what Azoulay would name as the 'potential history' of the 1990s that feels so distant today.

7   I came to learn about AdN through meeting the late Teresa Maffeis, the organisation's co-founder, during a research residency at the Université Côte d'Azur, of which Villa Arson is a part, April – July 2021. An interview between myself and Maffeis will be published in the forthcoming edition of *Hommes & Migrations*, titled 'Artistes, activistes et migrations', published by Musée de l'histoire d'Immigration with Open Edition Journals, in 2023.

In this room, three microhistories are placed in relation to 'map the context' of the ascendancy of globalisation in the 1990s. Yet the scenographic conditions, the 'landscaping' to use Buck-Morss's terminology, are crucial in forming this constellation. In creating a structure within a room that is not closed off but whose lower sections are left open allowing light to spill underneath, the contexts of Eindhoven, Seattle and Nice occupy space together. Or rather, one is aware of the presence of other images, micro-histories through the glow of light between the open sections of metal stud, or hearing the clicking of slides on the inside of the structure. They do not interfere with how images and archives are encountered but allow parallel narratives to coexist. Also worth noting is the use of images through which these microhisto-ries are mediated. Moving from Norbert van Onna's photographs, Sekula's slide show and the archives of AdN is to be made aware of the ways in which images act upon us, are reproduced and circulated, within exhibition spaces, archives and society. That these different forms of 'imaging' address stories of globali-sation and its resistance starts to rhyme with Arjun Appadurai's call to think 'images', 'imagined communi-ties' and the 'imaginary as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations' together, to understand a 'new role for the imagination in social life'.[8] In the interplay between different 'image' work, the situated, microhis-tories they point to and their spatial configuration *in relation* to one another, we start to experience what he describes as a 'negotiation between sites of agency (individuals) and globalized fields of possibility'.[9]

Cross back over *REWIND/REPLAY*, from the microhistories of Seattle, Eindhoven and Nice through the abstracted sonic environment of magnetic tape, scripts, scores and a performance waiting to happen, in the next gallery is the same modular structure that

8   A. Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 31.
9   *Ibid.*

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Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of *Waiting for Tear Gas (white globe to black)* (1999–2000), Allan Sekula, Van Abbemusueum, 2022–23

hosts images of CADA and the streets of Santiago in the 70s. Lining the left-hand wall is a series of 26 blocks of A4 paper. Miguel Benlloch's *Epigrams Against War* (1998 – 2018) is conceived as an alternative alphabet. Each epigram, an absurdist concrete poem, is dedicated to an internationalist struggle – Zapatistas, Somalia, the Iraq War to name a few. Within the exhibition it serves as an inventory of conflict and resistance of the 1990s, while its form, pieces of paper that the public can take away, has been conceived as an exhibitionary device, collapsing the separation between what is being looked at and those who are looking at it. Adjacent to *Epigrams* is *Palestinian Stone* (1993) also by Benlloch, a large red-and-green wallpaper with the recurring motif of a boy hurling a rock. The same image appears framed on top of the wallpaper. Produced the year the first Oslo Accords were agreed amidst genuine hope for a two-state solution, the piece takes its main image from a newspaper printed during the First Intifada.[10] Like the epigrams, the images from the streets of Seattle, the archives of AdN or Van Onna's empty factories, the work points to the conjuncture of the 1990s, of a world order shifting and turning.

The exhibition maps a conjunctural analysis of the 1990s, it uses signifiers to allude to the 'potential history' of the decade, the sense of 'what could have come'. Cornelius Castoriadis, as detailed previously, sees the symbolic as the vehicle through which 'everything is presented to us in the socio-historical world'.[11] Yet it is entirely dependent on the 'imaginary act' of connecting signs with events. Understanding

10   The First Intifada began on 9 December 1987 as an uprising against the occupation of the West Bank, Gaza and parts of Jerusalem by Israeli forces. Its end date is contested, though many commentators place it as the Madrid conference in 1991 (some take it to the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993). The intifada included violent street protests, civil disobedience and orchestrated strikes. For an introductory overview see Gregory Harms with Todd M. Ferry, 'The First Intifada and the Peace Process', in *The Palestine-Israel Conflict. A Basic Introduction*, London: Pluto Press, 2008, 141 – 58.
11   C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 117.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation views with works by Miguel Benlloch and actions by ACT UP-Barcelona, Van Abbemusuem, 2022 – 23
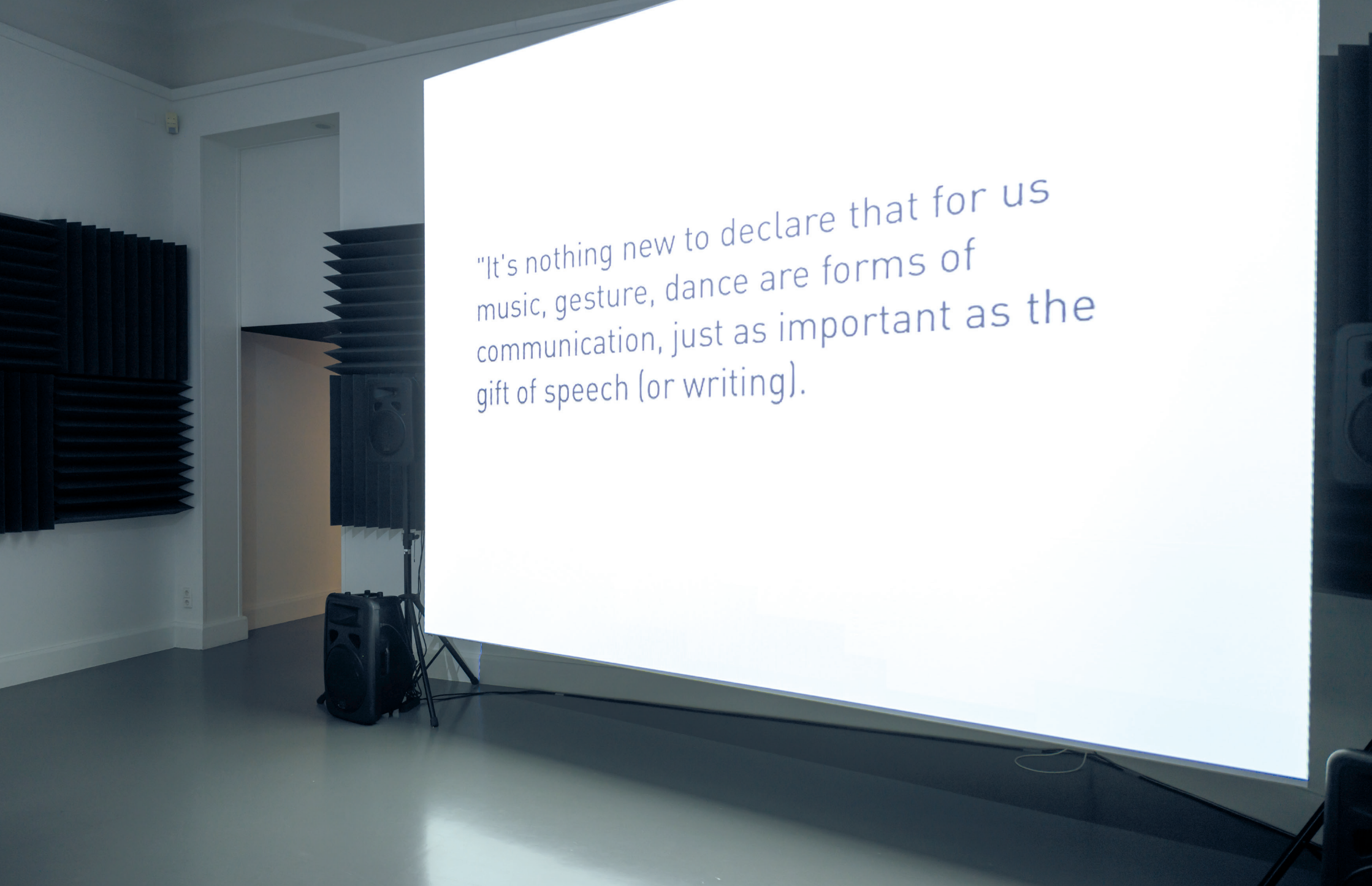
how the *Palestinian Stone* and *Waiting for Teargas*, draw on the 'imaginary act' that prompts visitors to shift between the occupation of Palestine or the anti-globalisation movement and its politics, recalls Castoriadis's proposition for how signs function in constituting the imaginary in terms of placing visitors in or across 'imagined' places and times, and the politics of those moments. Indeed, the back and forth between these works as reference and evocation is a way of rethinking the 'trajectory of knowledge' put forward by discourse on the curatorial, thinking with Castoriadis's understanding of art not as something that 'discovers' but that brings something into being. Castoriadis's thoughts on the symbolic and its role in constituting the imaginary helps in understanding what these images *do* and how they conjure imagined histories, spaces and political conjunctures. Equally, symbols key to formations of the imaginary allow us to think beyond the limits of the analytical and the representational in research-exhibition practices, and how exhibitions *construct imaginaries themselves.*

The rolling beats of Tony Cokes's *Microhaus or the Black Atlantic?* (2006 – 08) can be heard while looking at Benlloch's videos or the archival material of ACT UP-Barcelona. Walking through the light lock at the back of the AIDS Anarchive room, the speakers, the volume turned up as Condorelli observes so 'you feel the bass', pulse with the paired down sounds of Detroit and German minimalist techno. The room is lined with acoustic foam, installed in a 2.5 metre strip, the white walls visible above and below them, which as Condorelli notes, formally echo the pixelated equalizers that are the work's main formal component. The speakers are on stands next to the vast 4×3 metre screen, the aspect ratio of the film itself. The room is a 'dead end' that visitors cannot pass through – forced either to stand and be engulfed by the sound and image, or consciously turn around and go back the way they came.

Just as the movement from the constellation of images, documents and diagrams relating to Chile's democratic 'transition' is followed by the room-filling, abstracted installation of *REWIND/REPLAY*, so too a similar shift occurs moving from the AIDS Anarchive into *Microhaus*. The piecing together of references to conflict, struggle and emancipatory movements, and the mapping of communities of people such as ACT UP-Barcelona across artworks and documentation, is followed by the visceral experience of encountering Cokes's work. Sound and text engulf visitors rather than prompting a piecing together of visual clues or signifiers. The exhibition slips back into abstraction, images that you can 'read' giving way to paired down sound and text. The 'analysis' of the 1990s, or the construct of internationalism through modular structures and archival reproductions instead in this room comes through what Sarat Maharaj describes as different 'feel-think-know antennae'.[12]

In *Microhaus*, Cokes uses abstraction, or the non-representational to weave together Detroit and German minimalist techno, the writings of music producer Philip Sherburne and a series of quotes from Paul Gilroy's seminal 1993 publication *The Black Atlantic*. The work moves across the dance halls of the US where Detroit techno emerged from the African American experience and was a central feature of Afrofuturism, to Berlin, a predominantly white club scene and the context of a country grappling with anti-migrant xenophobia in the early 2000s. These contexts aren't represented – rather they are sampled, through the two sole components of quotation and sound. The working through of ideas related to a black consciousness central to Gilroy's book marks both the significance of *Black Atlantic* for the ways in which cultural studies was engaging with race in the 1990s, and the instantiation of or relay of another form

12   S. Maharaj, 'Xeno-Epistemics', 72.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of *Microhaus or the Black Atalantic?*, (2006 – 2008),
Tony Cokes, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

of imaginary. The very notion of a black consciousness central to Gilroy's thesis as something emerging from the legacies of the transatlantic slave trade proposes a form of shared imaginary, an imagined geography, to repurpose Edward Said's term, across continents. In this respect it chimes with the decolonial imaginary put forward by Mignolo, as the imaginative condition resulting from coloniality. That the proposition of a black imaginary is worked through the sonic makes Cokes's work an exemplar of what Maharaj describes as the 'xeno-equipment' needed that enables both 'other ways of knowing and ways of knowing "other-ness"'.[13] Cokes's work – its engagement with the imaginary of a 'black consciousness', its use of abstraction or nonrepresentational means, and its position in the show as a foil or counterpoint to the signifying work of the previous rooms – points to a relationship between the imagined, the nonrepresentational, the abstract *and* the specific conjuncture within which the *Black Atlantic* arose. It is a proposition, as a work itself, a device within the exhibition, and as a method within the context of the inquiry that uses the nonrepresentational as the key strategy for constituting knowledge, and by extension the imaginary.

Walking out of *Microhaus* back through the AIDS Anarchive, through the dancing screens, lights and voice-over of *REWIND/REPLAY* and finally over the Venn diagram of the 'Three Ecologies', visitors pass through the entrance hall. If you turn right you are met by *Zanzibar* (1999 – 2022), the painting installation and accompanying sound piece, commissioned for the exhibition, by Magda Stawarska-Beavan. In my essay for the *Rewinding Internationalism* publication I begin by describing my decision not to hang the works on the wall, 'to create a more bodily encounter with the works'.[14] I describe Lubaina Himid's observation made

when we were simulating the hanging of the paintings, that there was no single place in the room where all the works and sounds could be experienced together. 'Perhaps', I wrote, 'this sense of needing to move through, to see things from multiple sides and angles, to deny the possibility of a single point of view, led me to propose hanging the works from the ceiling instead of the wall. But if it was, it wasn't conscious.'[15] In this room, 'the first objectively beautiful room', as Condorelli describes it, this sense or strategy of evocation, is at its most palpable. The paintings – teary, watery canvases – are the only abstract canvases the artists produced. Created following a trip to Zanzibar in the mid-90s (the country where she the artist was born but which she left as a three-month-old after the death of her father), abstraction was the only means through which Himid felt able to transmit her relationship, or emotions, to this place. In my essay I describe how the combination of the artist's paintings and Stawarska-Beavan's eight-channel sound piece, which includes recordings from BBC Radio 3 that Himid listened to in her studio when she made the works, recited excerpts from a guidebook her father gave her British mother before she travelled pregnant with Himid in 1954, shipping forecasts – allows these spaces and places to coexist:

> Leaning in, glancing at Lubaina's cube forms hovering on the canvases above teary drips, one travels across the 1950s, 1990s and today, and also the shorelines of Zanzibar the artist left as a baby, her studio, the BBC radio recording suite, and the ports and bays named in the shipping forecast. Neither marked, represented, nor explicated, these moments and places co-exist, reshaping and rebounding off one another, like waves hitting a pier.[16]

Himid is the only artist in the exhibition that also appeared in *The Place Is Here*, whose title is borrowed

13   *Ibid.*, 72.
14   Nick Aikens, '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Political Imaginaries at Work', in *Rewinding Internationalism*, 7.

15   *Ibid.*
16   *Ibid.*, 8

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Lubaina Himid, and Magda Starwaska-Bevan,
Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Lubaina Himid, and Magda Starwaska-Bevan,
Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

from a line of text in her work in that exhibition, the seminal cut-out and collage *We Will Be* (1983). One of the starting points of *Rewinding Internationalism* had been the concept of New Internationalism put forward by artists and thinkers associated with iniva, a trajectory that can be traced back to the 1980s and artists like Himid tussling with the notion of 'B/black art'. My choice to show *Zanzibar* – hanging from the ceiling – is symptomatic of a shift in approach over the course of the PhD. If works such as *We Will Be* with its text and collaged newspaper clippings defiantly and unambiguously proclaim position (both as artworks and in *The Place Is Here*), *Zanzibar* is markedly different. Abstracted, hanging in space, and accompanied by a multi-channel sound piece, its meaning is not prescribed. The work and its interpretation need to be approached from multiple viewpoints, experienced in tandem with sounds and reflections from the present.

Moving through this room a soft projection is visible on a large semi-circular curtain. The image is barely discernible as rain drops falling on water, though as visitors often remark, it resembles the white noise from a TV screen. Move around the curtain and the modular structure reappears, showing documentation images of performances, installations and happenings. The captions and guides inform viewers the images are from two iterations of the 'Keepers of the Waters' (1995 – 96) project, initiated by artist Betsy Damon, part of her near thirty-year practice dedicated to raising awareness of water as 'the source of all life'.[17] On two of the walls is a thin U-shaped, metal shelf, on which rest a series of Damon's recent works on paper. In contrast to the documentary images, all borrowed from the Asia Art Archive, these works on paper are largely abstract explorations of water. The images move between microscopic depictions of water droplets to whole galaxies and offset the documentation

17   See Betsy Damon, *Water Talks*, New York: Steiner Books, 2022.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Betsy Damon and 'The Keepers of the Waters' archive, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Betsy Damon and 'Keepers of the Waters'
archive, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

presented on the modular structures. Walking around the structures – another dead end in the exhibition – the abstract works on paper and documentary images appear in different configurations, seen through the milky acrylic panels or the open metal frame that joins sections of the structure. The interplay between documentation and abstraction, prevalent in the exhibition, is interfaced with directly in this room. Pairing different types of works loosens, if you like, the 'Keepers of the Waters' – indeed Damon's – engagement with water. We move across a record of an intervention with specific actors, a practice specific to Chengdu and Lhasa, to a more abstracted proposition.

As you walk to the back end of Damon's room you can hear, through the walls, the beats of Cokes's *Microhaus*. In the standard parkour of the Van Abbemuseum's old building you would have moved from 'Keepers of the Waters' to Cokes's installation. Hearing these beats as Condorelli observes, one is aware of a parallel narrative, of parallel worlds coexisting at the same time. The affect is far stronger than I had anticipated. My original motivation had been to interrupt a linear reading, to prompt visitors to look twice at material, to experience artworks and readings of microhistories in multiple sequences – to rewind and 'unlearn', to borrow Azoulay's formulation, what they had seen before. What I had not anticipated in the physical proximity, but inaccessibility of certain spaces, was a sense and awareness of multiple worlds coexisting. So rather than simply create the conditions to overturn linear readings (of history or ideas) in the exhibition, the scenography created the spatial conditions in which to apprehend multiple narratives and subjective positions circling around the conjuncture of the 1990s so that the imaginaries of Black consciousness and 'inter-species internationalism' coexist. And not to explain or justify a relation but simply to put them in proximity. It created the conditions to understand Appadurai's notion of 'imagined worlds' when he speaks of 'multiple worlds that are constituted by

the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the world'.[18]

Entering the third section of the exhibition, visitors meet eighty-two portraits of people of colour as part of *Many Thousand Gone* (2000). The portraits are fixed onto strips of grey, raw plasterboard, itself attached to a curved metal stud frame. It is the first in a series of circular forms that visitors are presented with across two rooms. Olu Oguibe made this work when visiting Europe from South Africa and describes it as a monument to the lives lost to AIDS in South Africa in the 1990s. The installation that appears on the opposite side of the building to *Zanzibar* works through the most representative of devices, the portrait. Yet, as we learn from the wall text, they are anonymous, a form of fabulation representing the lives of whole communities, rather than specific people. As you stand among these faces, the soaring soundtrack of Didem Pekün's *Disturbed Earth* (2021) can be heard. It is not clear that the soundtrack belongs to a film next door. Rather, as Condorelli astutely observes, its sense of drama and pathos adds to the emotion in the room.

Walking through *Many Thousand Gone*, *Disturbed Earth* is projected onto a circular screen protruding from the corner of the gallery. Opposite it a thick black carpet and curved bench mirror the shape of the screen. The film itself, a four-part, thirty-minute piece follows the twenty-four hours prior to the fall of Srebrenica in 1995 during the Bosnian War. In the script all references to place and date are removed. References to the genocide appear only in the opening and closing credits, the scenes of white male bureaucrats failing to avert catastrophe becoming a stand in for the wider failure of supranational organisations to keep people from harm's way. In the framing of the exhibition in Aalst I emphasise the scripted, score-like nature of *Disturbed Earth*. Equally, there, it is paired with the first version of *REWIND/REPLAY*,

18   A. Appadurai, *Modernity At Large*, 53.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Olu Oguibe and Didem Pekün, Van Abbemuseum, 2022–23

which include the five-channel recordings of actors reading a script, based on found song lyrics, and the research boards that 'scored' the projects in development. In the Van Abbemuseum iteration, placed in close proximity to *Many Thousand Gone* and the following room, which, as is later described, addresses the Non-Aligned Movement from the vantage point of the 1990s, it is placed in a very different set of coordinates. It is articulated, historically, conjuncturally, with respect to both the loss of black lives from the AIDS pandemic, and the 'passing' of the political project of the Non-Aligned Movement, to use Buck-Morss's term. In Aalst emphasis is placed on scripting and scoring as a means to rehearse an idea. Here, *Disturbed Earth*'s scripting, alongside *Many Thousand Gone* and the Non-Aligned Movement rehearse internationalism as a construct, an imaginary of sorts, that has been extinguished with the events of the 1990s.

Buck-Morss's use of the political imaginary in relation to the context of the early 1990s is insightful when considering both these works. In *Many Thousand Gone* and *Disturbed Earth*, the artists, Oguibe and Pekün, respectively, choose not to name or identify an enemy. This is more explicit in *Disturbed Earth* where the focus is on the inaction of those in positions of power rather than the perpetrators (or victims) of genocide. Buck-Morss, citing Valerii Podoroga, 'distinguishes the "enemy" both as a term within the political imaginary and, on a metalevel, as a threat *to* the political imaginary. She writes:

> So long as the enemy really acts like the enemy, it poses no threat on this second level. Paradoxically, the threat on the metalevel is that the enemy might disappear. But a threat to what or to whom? Clearly to the legitimacy of the sovereign agent. More than that, however. The disappearance of the enemy threatens to dissolve the collective itself.[19]

19   Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 13.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of Disturbed Earth (2022), Didem Pekün, Van Abbemuseum,
2022 – 23

And while *Disturbed Earth*, with is empty, circular unfolding of an avoidable catastrophe points to this very possibility, the eighty-two faces meeting visitors, makes visible the very disappearance of collective lives – a monument both to lives lost and, perhaps, the imaginary of the collective itself.

Moving out of *Disturbed Earth* is a room with two large freestanding structures, again with exposed metal studs and grey MDF panelling and angled obliquely to the wall. The first structure, on the left as you walk in, houses two brightly coloured canvases by the painter and activist Semsar Siahaan. Moving around the structure, the resin, faux bronze sculpture, is Nadiah Bamadhaj's *Casting Spells for the Movement* (2021), a three-metre-tall woman holding a plate and raising it with both hands. To the figure's left as you face her and on the other side of the structure is *TU H DA DI* (1987), the three-metre wide, geometric, black and white painting by Julije Knifer, one of three works by members of the Gorgona Group, the avant-garde collective active in the 1950s and 60s but long disbanded by the time these works were made. On the other side of the room, on the second of the struc-tures is the *Nlloro* (1991), the large figurative, greyscale collography print by the Cuban printmaker Belkis Ayón Manso. The table contains various publications and archival materials. In the far corner the sculpture *Ax and Stump* (1996), by Gorgona member Ivan Kožarić sits on the floor. On the other side of the Belkis Ayón Manso structure were reproductions of a series of works by Josip Vaništa, also a Gorgona member, from the 1950s and 60s. Opposite the figure and protruding from the wall is a semi-circular table made from the same MDF as the wall structures and sitting on simple metal trestles, alluding to large summit tables around which world leaders sit. In the centre is a thick hard-bound post-exhibition catalogue *Contemporary Art of the Non Aligned Countries.* Fluroscent Post-it notes mark a number of pages in the book, including a repro-duction of the work of Knifer, a similar *Ax and Stump*

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Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Belkis Ayón Manso, Nadiah Bamadhaj, Ivan Kožarić, Semsar Siahaan and various archival materials, Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

by Kožarić, the collage by Vaništa, a print by Belkis Ayón Manso and a painting by Siahaan.

In the interview 'Aligning Research and the Non-Aligned' with myself, Bojana Piškur, Grace Samboh and Rachel Surijata, who all collaborated on this room, we trace the process of arriving at this constellation of works.[20] As the interview reveals, perhaps more than anywhere in the show, this room is an example of what Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson describe as 'research action' in relation to exhibition making.[21] The three of us began from the same starting point – an exhibition that took place in 1995 in Jakarta under the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement and at the initiation of then president Suharto – but with different interests and motivations for looking at this project. As I mentioned in chapter two, the idea to include this exhibition in the project came from Piškur in the working group. Researching the cultural activity of the Non-Aligned Movement for over a decade, from the vantage point of former Yugosalvia as a founding member of the movement, this exhibition had appeared only fleetingly in her research and she was keen to further this work within the context of *Rewinding Internationalism.* Samboh, a researcher based in Yogyakarta, and who we invited to work on the project had been researching the exhibition for some time due to her interest in the Galeri Nasional Indonesia, whose collection included a number of works shown in the 1995 exhibition. My interest, when Piškur started to talk about the exhibition was twofold. Firstly, what did it mean to hold an exhibition within the framework of the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1990s, when the very idea of being 'Non-Aligned' in relation to Soviet socialism and US liberal democracy was no longer applicable in the new post-Cold War reality? The accompanying seminar to the exhibition

20   See B. Piškur, G. Samboh, and R. Surijatas in conversation with N. Aikens, 'Aligning Research and the Non-Aligned', in *Rewinding Internationalism*, 41 – 56.
21   'An Opening to Curatorial Enquiry: Introduction to Curating and Research', in *Curating Research*, 11 – 23.

offered another fascinating entry point: it brought together artists, curators and art historians from across the world with a particular focus on what it described as 'south-south' relations, manifesting a form of internationalism at the onset of a newly globalised art system.

The discussions with Samboh, Piškur and later Surijata traversed histories and directions, as detailed in our conversations – from the history of the Non-Aligned and relationship between Presidents Tito and Sukarno in the 1950s, the ideas and activism of Siahaan and his proposals for an internationalist artist centre, and the location of the exhibition itself and preceding Non-Aligned summit in 1991 where the idea for the exhibition first emerged. What visitors come to encounter in that room is a constellation of images and references that touch on these elements. For visitors who want to work through the clues – matching the reproductions in the catalogue to the artists in the room, looking at images of dioramas of the famed Bandung Conference in 1955 and the 1991 conference, or the reproductions of letters between Tito and Sukarno, one could start to piece together a puzzle that spans over forty years and the waning of both the internationalist project of the Non-Aligned Movement and the project of 'Unity in Diversity' that underpins Indonesia in the second half of the century. Yet, for the most part, this room, with the geometric shapes of Knifer opposite the exquisite figuration of Belkis Ayón Manso, hard-edged abstraction meeting the textures of collography, but both in formal dialogue through their greyscale, there is a sense of works – and ideas – being out of synch, out of time. There is a certain anachronism in including Gorgona in the 1995 exhibition as Croatia's representatives. The group, as mentioned, was active in the 1950s in former Yugoslavia. There was too a certain anachronism in Suharto attempting to match the perceived stature of Bandung through the 1991 conference, the year the Soviet Union collapsed and the idea of being Non-Aligned started to fall away. It is this sense of things being out of time, of a disjointedness that lingers in

the room. And as we came to constellate the gallery, to think through the angles of the structures to show the paintings – not parallel but oblique, facing but not directly opposing them – or the form of the table, semi-circular to allude to the vast conference tables around which leaders would sit at Non-Aligned conferences – or the greyscale consistent throughout Knifer, Belkis Ayón Manso and Bamadhaj's work, this sense of the exhibition being a portal to consider different but interconnected times, histories and political projects manifest itself. Here, the research methods detailed in chapter one are entirely inadequate to describe the process of selecting single works, of how those works were also dependent on what we could find, what we could afford to bring to the Netherlands.[22] Rather the process of exhibition as research became an elaborate form of constructing and solving a puzzle in space. Instead of arriving at a fully formed image, a representation, the pieces are left unassembled. The image, if it is formed at all, is the imaginative work of the visitor. Buck-Morss distinguishes her adoption of the political imaginary from 'Western discussions', where 'it has come to mean little more than the logic of discourse, or world view'.[23] She, as noted in 'The Political Imaginary' is interested in the 'form' and 'shape' of the political imaginary as inferred by the term *Obraz* where different 'actors' are positioned. This room fails to offer a clear 'world view'. Rather, different positions – of the avant garde of Gorgona, of Semsaar's political activism or of the Non-Aligned movement are placed in a topography, that visitors are required to walk through and around.

22   For example, there are very few works by Semsar Siahaan that we were able to source. The painting form the 1995 exhibition was, despite Samboh and Surijata's extensive efforts, untraceable. Eventually Samboh identified two paintings in the inventory of Gajah Gallery, who represent Siahaan's estate and negotiated with the gallery for them to pay for transport costs of the works. We were able to loan the work *Ax and Stump* (1996) by Ivan Kožarić from private lenders – though this was not the work that was included in the 1995 exhibition, it likewise included an ax and a tree stump. The work in the 1995 exhibition was undoubtedly destroyed after the exhibition.

23   S. Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe*, 11.

Returning to *Disturbed Earth*, what occurs when this film is flanked by *Many Thousand Gone* and the Non-Aligned room? As Condorelli remarks in relation to the failure of the UN in Srebrenica: 'It is the end of the hope around international peace-keeping. It ends in that moment, the UN tools are publicly made inadequate.' She goes on: 'In some ways the feeling overwhelmingly when I went to the Non-Aligned room is the feeling when the Post-WWII moment ends, because it is such positive moment around internationalism, setting up all these structures that were very optimistic in nature, real structural attempts at internationalism and peace-keeping.' Condorelli's reading, prompted by watching *Disturbed Earth* and that 'rewinds' to a post-WWII moment – is markedly on point and closely echoes Buck-Morss's diagnosis of the post Cold War moment as 'shattering an entire conception of the world. In a real sense.' She writes, 'it marked the end of the twentieth century'.[24] This section of the exhibition – from the anonymous faces of black lives lost, the abject failure of supranational bodies to avert catastrophe and the out of jointness of the Non-Aligned project in 1995, points to the 'catastrophe' that was the end of a promise of internationalism in the 1990s.

Walking through the Non-Aligned room visitors meet yet another dead end, the carpeted projection room showing Pejvak's new film *Shokouk* (2022). From the adjacent room the softly lit cocoon-like form hanging from the ceiling is visible. The light brown object, viewers are told in the exhibition guide, was a seat on board the shuttle that took cosmonauts from the Baikonur launch pad in Kazakhstan to Mir, the international space station. The seat, bought by the artists on eBay in 2021, would have certainly been on the shuttle that took Sergei Krikalev, the astronaut who went to Mir in 1991. When in space Krikalev was told he could not return to the country he had left – the Soviet Union – as it no longer existed and he needed

24   *Ibid.*

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Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of Shokouk (2022), Pejvak (Rouzbeh Akhbari and Felix Kalmenson), Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

to wait while they found a place for him to land. For this he was famously dubbed the Last Soviet. The story of the Last Soviet and Baikonur is a portal into the time-travelling work of *Shokouk*, commissioned for the exhibition and which begins with gossiping crowds gathering to watch a rocket launch at Baikonur. Divided into four chapters, the film moves between the fictional archival character Nikitin Nikifor, a karaoke event joining the inauguration of a Chinese infrastructure company (Skybride Unlimted in Uzbekistan) and ends onboard Mir. The film pulls together a constellation of references that moves between twelfth- and thirteenth-century Muslim astronomers and polymaths, Omar Khayyam and Nasir Din Al-Tusi to the teachings of Italian physicist Carlo Rovelli on the essence of time and considering the harmful environmental impacts of space travel. Pejvak's film is both a critical and speculative fabulation. Its episodic nature allows different contexts and realities to interface with one another. While these realities and the potential incongruencies being experienced side by side or sequentially does not need to be 'resolved', like the exhibition, it is through this constellation of references, characters and histories that meaning emerges.

During a public conversation with contributors of the exhibition at the opening of *Rewinding Internationalism*, Rouzbeh Akbhari and Felix Kalmenson, members of Pejvak astutely remarked that internationalism should be considered temporally as well as spatially. Extending the notion of internationalism as an imaginary we can start to see, both in Pejvak's space-time travel and across the exhibition as a whole, the notion of internationalism as an 'imagined time' as Said would name it. Yet it is not one that positions time as 'over there', as described in *Orientalism*, as closed off and demarcated, as 'other' – but through the circulation of images and references, of them hanging in space, being physically navigated, these imagined times occupy, and by inference inform, the present. Through their very inhabiting of space together, or their overlay in single images or

sequences on the film, they underscore time and history itself as an imaginary.

In the final section of the film, aboard Mir and listening to quotes from Rovelli on the essence of time, the camera on the CGI-ed spaceship zooms in on a computer screen. As we get closer it shows an image of empty chairs and people starting to gather. We move in closer and closer to the TV screen until the image takes up the entire frame. We are back at the start of the film. Back to where we started, visitors walk out of the room, back through the promise of the Non-Aligned, the catastrophe on Srebrenica and the crowds of faces of imaginary lives lost.

The circularity of Pejvak's film, of an end becoming a beginning, coupled with visitors being forced to turn back and start again, emphasises a sense of events perpetually repeating themselves. Walking back through the rooms that travel in time, in geography and across political contexts, internationalism is presented as itself a political imaginary – as something that moves between events, places and symbols. The project had begun from multiple starting points, understanding internationalism as a political horizon (to use Sheikh's term) that had informed social and emancipatory movements, from the workers' movement to projects of decolonisation. The 1990s was put forward as a moment when that horizon of internationalism went through fundamental permutations with the ascendancy of globalisation, geopolitical changes brought on by the end of the Cold War and subsequent rising nationalisms. What *Rewinding Internationalism* did was not explain or represent that history, but rather positioned different events, ideas and figures in a 'topography' to be experienced. Similarly, through its varying forms of analysis and evocation – a coming together of curatorial choices, subjectivities and the foregrounding of scenography – it reveals internationalism as itself a political imaginary. Crucially, the imaginary is constructed by multiple people – artists, researchers, scenographers – and symbols and references they use

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Josip Vaništa and Didem Pekün,
Van Abbemuseum, 2022 – 23

in the exhibition. In this sense the political imaginary, through the unfolding of the project, became both a device with which to understand the relationship between the exhibition, processes of research and the political, and to offer insights into, or parallels with, the 'subject' of the exhibition itself – internationalism.

This chapter conducts a walk through of the exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum, narrating a close reading (one of many possible pathways through the exhibition). At various points observations and reflections from Céline Condorelli are included to aid in this narration. The aim is to use the exhibition at the Van Abbemuseum – its instantiation of analytic and scenographic operations – to coalesce the different strands of the project. It builds on the observations made in 'Beyond Representing Ideology', such as in approaching exhibitions as processes of inquiry that engage the political, operations and spatial conditions are rarely named in discourse on the curatorial. These span methods, or analytical devices, as well as physical and spatial choices that determine how the epistemological 'event' in the exhibition unfolds. What this chapter points to is that in simply announcing this 'event', one misses what is particular to the exhibitionary process and form. The walk through is also in close dialogue with '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations'. The chapter reveals the starting points for the exhibition as well as the methods/methodology and its use of scenography. Lastly, the chapter draws on the multiple uses of the political imaginary mapped in chapter three – as a device to navigate the relationship between the exhibition itself (its material and spatial conditions), the processes of research and the political. The political imaginary, its capacity for analysis and evocation, the manner it has been used to describe and dissect the geopolitical and cultural shifts in the 1990s, as well as being an analogy for a terrain or landscape, offers a means to bring the onto-epistemological and operational registers of the exhibition into a more balanced relationship.

Conclusion: *Rewinding Internationalism* at the Villa Arson

I write this closing section shortly after the third iteration of *Rewinding Internationalism* has opened at the Villa Arson. The exhibition in Nice contains many of the elements from the Van Abbemuseum in Eindhoven: works, archives as well as scenographic devices such as the display modules. The exhibition spaces are vastly different. The 1930s Eindhoven building is a symmetrical parkour containing ten white cubes. At the Villa Arson, part of the brutalist building added to the original villa in the 1970s, the galleries are referred to as the 'labyrinth'. It comprises a number of smaller spaces, a series of alcoves, split over multiple levels. As a result much of the positioning of works has been determined by the building.[1]

The architectural conditions prompted a reconfiguration of the sequencing, forming new relationships and associations. For example, in the downstairs galleries, the presentation of 1995 Non-Aligned exhibition is adjacent to susan pui san lok's *REWIND/REPLAY*. The overlapping voices from the Gate Foundation archive ruminating on 1990s 'New Internationalism' from Europe is followed by an exhibition and seminar that centres south-south relations. Upstairs, the street happenings of ACT UP-Barcelona across three monitors stacked on top of one another is preceded by an expanded presentation on the archives of Association pour la démocratie á Nice (AdN) – creating a dialogue between the forms and energy of street happenings across two Mediterranean cities. The sequence casts both projects within the context of a wider struggle for minority rights in the 1990s.

Working again with Natascha Leonie Simons as a scenographer, we opted to interrupt the parkour of the exhibition. Visitors enter to see Allan Sekula's slide show *Waiting for Teargas (white globe to black)* (1999 – 2000). Rather than walk through the opening gallery they are forced to turn around, re-enter the

1   There is only one space large enough to house *REWIND/REPLAY*, for example, and the limited spaces with no natural light determined where video works can and can't be shown.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Nadiah Bamadhaj, Julije Knifer, Semsar Siahaan and various archival materials, Villa Arson, 2023

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view of *REWIND/REPLAY* (2023), susan pui san lok/*lok pui san*,
2023, Villa Arson 2023

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Allan Sekula (above) and Migeul Benlloch (below),
Villa Arson, 2023

main foyer of the building and move through a second exhibition space, a long corridor where they encounter the twenty-four sheets of Miguel Benlloch's *Epigrams Against War* (1999 – 2018) followed by the presentation of the AdN archive. In contrast to the central foyer of the Van Abbemuseum with its three entry points, there is a single route in the Villa Arson. The work of Sekula, Benlloch and the AdN archive offer consecutive, contextual entry points: Seattle in 1999 and anti-globalisation protests, an inventory of wider internationalist struggle from Sierra Leone to the Zapatistas and the AIDS pandemic, and finally the specific locality of Nice as it faced a surge in nationalist, anti-migrant rhetoric through the National Front. Formally, the sequencing moves across the anti-documentary images of Sekula's slide show, the absurdist poetry of Benlloch and the multiple forms of protest, carnival and street performance present in the AdN archive, transmitting these contexts across multiple registers.

At the Villa Arson, the cumulative effect of the commissioned works, collaborative research projects and the central scenographic devices (from the modular display system and use of works hanging in space) rehearse the form of analysis-evocation outlined in my close reading of the exhibition in Eindhoven.[2] The starting points and collaborative processes detailed in the 'processes and operations' chapter are all equally applicable to this last version of the project. The components of the exhibition – its movement across the Non-Aligned Movement in the 1990s, the AIDS pandemic, the genocide in Srebrenica, undoubtedly evoke the 1990s and the various permutations of internationalism as a 'passing of dream worlds' to use Buck-Morss's phrase once again. In other words, its

2   Many of the observations I make in the previous chapter regarding the operations of *Rewinding Internationalism* in Eindhoven, the shifts in register, mode of address, the sense of parallel narratives, as well as Céline Condorelli's comments on the display of the exhibition, have been made spending extended periods in the exhibition itself. This was not possible in Nice and my observations and reflections on this iteration of the project remain preliminary.
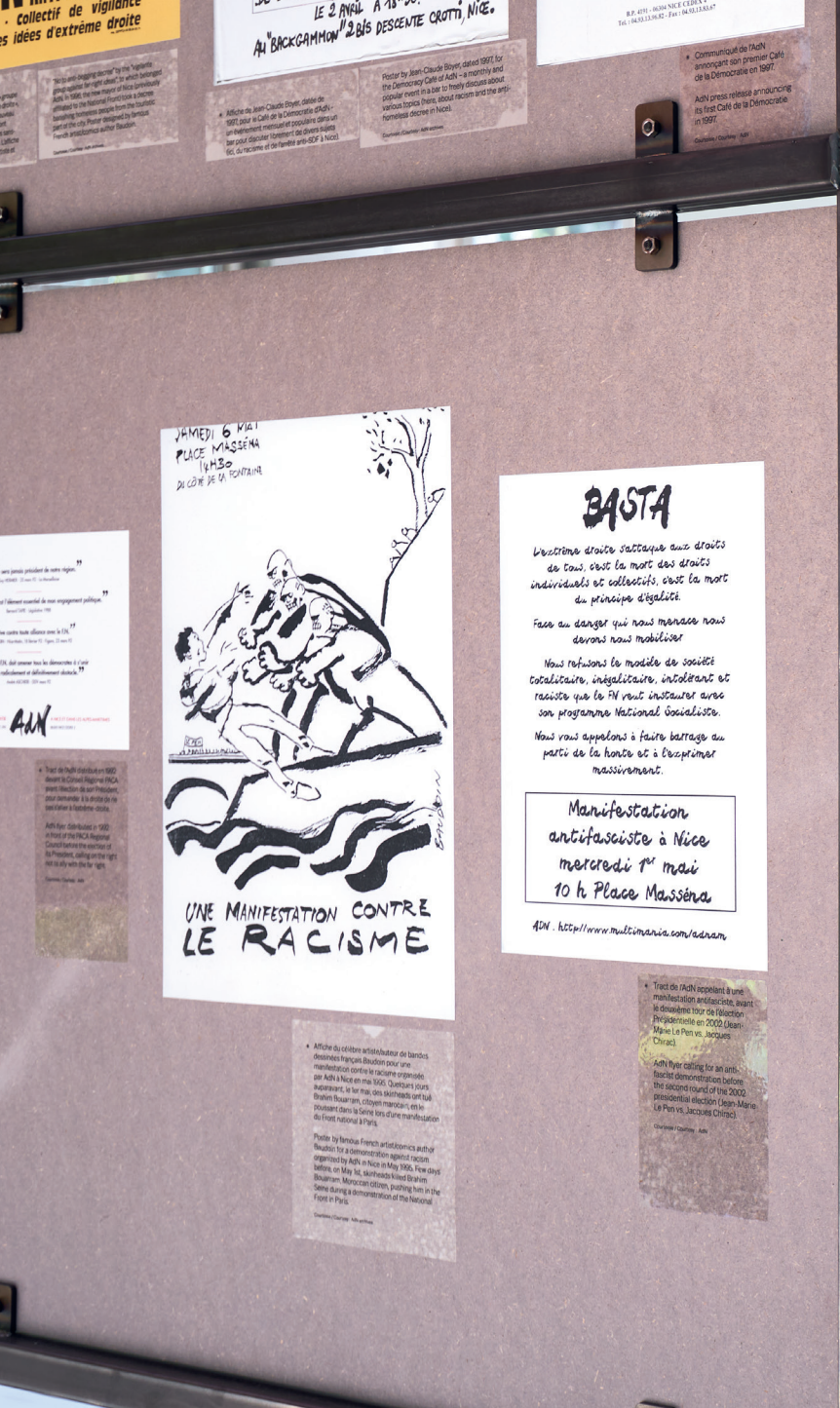
Rewinding Internationalism, installation views wth works by Miguel Benlloch, Miguel Parra Urrutia and ACT UP-Barcelona (above) and material from the ADN archive (below), Villa Arson, 2023

form of conjunctural analysis – or the ingredients of the analysis – are carried over into this last iteration.

Yet, the particular sequencing of material and the architecture of the building create different sensorial experiences and with them a different epistemological 'event' compared to that of the Van Abbemuseum show. Visitors take a single route through rather than the parallel narratives of the Van Abbemuseum, meaning the Villa Arson offers fragments experienced in sequence, like film clips played one after another. It means that rooms, images and contexts are not experienced multiple times or read through multiple relations to one another, but in succession. Navigating the building – the labyrinthine quality of multiple alcoves, or the light-filled galleries, the sense of exhibition as an imagined topography or landscape is arguably more palpable than in Eindhoven.

The convergences between the two (expanded) iterations in Eindhoven and Nice reinforce a number of observations in the project: 1) identifying uses of historical analysis as a way of naming how exhibitions operate as processes of inquiry while engaging the political, the focus of the chapter 'Beyond Representing Ideology'; 2) introducing parallels between uses of the political imaginary and how exhibitions similarly function as 'landscapes' for analysis and evocation; and 3) offering a reading of internationalism itself as a form of political imaginary as it pertains to its uses outlined in the chapter 'The Political Imaginary'. At the same time, identifying the divergences underscores the pitfalls of making generalised – or abstracted – pronouncements on exhibitions, even when it pertains to two versions of a single exhibition project. While the manifold 'processes and operations' of the exhibition (its starting points, commissioning, collaborations, etc.) were used in both versions, the different physical and material instantiations in the Villa Arson and the Van Abbemuseum emphasise how exhibitions – and their relationship to processes of inquiry and engaging the political – need to attend to their singularities.

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Sandra Rylvain Rinaudo and material from the
ADN archive, Villa Arson, 2023

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Lubaina Himid and Madga Starwaska Bevan (above) and Olu Oguibe (below), Villa Arson, 2023

The components of the exhibition in Nice are, for the most part what was presented in Eindhoven. Yet their presentation is instantiated and articulated differently, offering particular spatial and experiential registers. These particularities, and the relations and affects they mobilise, support the project's claim of attending to the operations of *an* exhibition and point to the limits of making pronouncements on *the* exhibition as generalised form. The close reading of the exhibition in Eindhoven and the more cursory observations about the differences with the Villa Arson iteration are part of the project's aim to give greater focus to the operations of exhibitions, not as a move to downplay their onto-epistemological register, but to underline how they intersect and inform one another.

Rewinding the Trajectory of the Project and its Claims

The remainder of the conclusion recaps the aims of this project and the trajectory of the inquiry, considering the contribution of the overall project. As indicated repeatedly, this research project engages two registers: the onto-epistemological and the operational, as these pertain to discourse on exhibitions and their relationship to processes of inquiry and the political. A formulation of the two registers emerged in the process of editing the *PARSE* journal issue *On the Question of Exhibition.* The intersecting of the two registers is mirrored in the structure of this document and its lenses that move between mapping the field, engaging with theoretical-analytical constructs and detailing procedural and experiential aspects of an iterative exhibition project. Neither register is treated in isolation. 'Beyond Representing Ideology', building on the essay 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices' places the project in the context of discourse on the curatorial and the exhibitionary (and the discourse's epistemological claims). The chapter also identifies historical analyses in exhibition practices, bringing the wider con-

sideration of the exhibition into dialogue with its field of operations, as it pertains to analytical strategies.

The project's engagement with the onto-epistemological has also involved 'picking up' theory at different moments – whether that be theories of articulation from cultural studies or formulations of the imaginary as focused on in the chapter 'The Political Imaginary' to approach the central task of the inquiry. Both theories of articulation and the political imaginary are useful in positing parallels with exhibitionary dynamics and procedures. Theories of articulation, and specifically conjunctural analysis, remain important to the project while having clear limits as discursive formulations when addressing the experiential quality of exhibitions. The uses of the political imaginary affords greater scope for bringing together analysis-evocation alongside questions of image and form. Furthermore they allow for a reading of internationalism itself as political imaginary. However, the political imaginary remains a relatively open and mobile theoretical construct. I adopt its different uses heuristically – by which I mean they serve as entry points rather than as a definitive resolution in considering the relationship between exhibitions, research and the political, as well as the specific context of the 1990s. Through detailing the field of operations in two of this document's chapters, I emphasise the operational register and how it intersects, informs and is informed by the onto-epistemological. As such, '*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary' seeks to situate these two registers in relation to one another, reappraising and subsequently rebalancing how they are weighted in existing discourse on the curatorial and exhibitions.

The project began with the impulse to explore the relationship between exhibition making, processes of research and the political. The narrative of the research development underscores that the terms through which this relationship has been articulated have shifted and, as with many processes of inquiry, the identification and clarification of the terms are constitutive moments

within the research process and not merely preliminary moves. Here this has occurred through centring the exhibition within the research project. In the first chapter, and evidenced through different essays, journals and conversations in the submission, the project tasks itself with investigating the specific affordances of exhibition practices so that ideas, ideologies and political positions are not illustrated or represented but given form through processes and operations, given open ended disclosure rather than finalised representation. In 'Beyond Representing Ideology', noting how the existing discourse on the curatorial foregrounds its epistemological claims, and that recent discourse on exhibitions tends towards generalised pronouncements or case studies, points to a lack in vocabulary to describe the methodologies and processes whereby this relationship unfolds. As a counter-move I introduce a number of strategies of historical analysis that describe how exhibitions operate as research sites, while identifying the limits of mapping methods from other disciplines. Resisting forms of representation – so that ideas and positions are not predetermined – was put forward as the necessary condition through which 'unknown knowledges' as Denise Ferreira da Silva names them, could come into being.

The chapter '*Rewinding Internationalism*: Processes and Operations' turns to the processes and operations of the exhibition at the centre of this project, outlining its overlapping contexts, concerns and trajectories. I track the genealogy of *Rewinding Internationalism* through *The Place Is Here*, the move in focus from the 1980s and the work of B/black artists in the UK to internationalism in the 1990s – in part the result of a shift in discourse at the time and an evolving evaluation of the construct of race. I turn to the context of the museum confederation L'Internationale, whose name derives from the anthem of the nineteenth-century workers' movement and 'Our Many Europes', the four-year programme whose focus was the 1990s. L'Internationale and 'Our Many Europes' became both a context and a structure through which the project

Rewinding Internationalism, installation view with works by Lubaina Himid, Magda Starwaska Bevan,
Betsy Damon and 'Keepers of the Waters' archive, Villa Arson, 2023

took place, a context that was both investigated and operationalised. I then describe the development of the exhibition across commissioning, a working group and loans, the 'rehearsal' at Netwerk Aalst and the development of the scenography of the show that opened up the conception and composition of the project in multiple ways. The final part of this chapter details the approach to scenography as something that could spatialise the concerns of the exhibition. Viewed together these two chapters map intersecting elements – a consideration of the affordances of exhibitions and the processes and operations of '*Rewinding Internationalism*'. The focus on the genealogies and subsequent trajectories emphasise context, cautioning against more generalised pronouncements. Trajectories (that of the researcher-curator) as well as institutional context (in this case the confederation L'Internationale) inform the approach and method. The chapter centres 'processes and operations' not to discount the onto-epistemological claims of the exhibition project but to demonstrate how they intersect: L'Internationale working group and subsequent collaborative research projects, or the foregrounding of scenography, being two clear examples.

The chapter 'The Political Imaginary' shifts registers again. It introduces different uses of the 'imaginary' across history, sociology, political theory and within the art system, extending an understanding of the term beyond the work of Cornelius Castoriadis and Benedict Anderson. Edward Said's 'imagined geography' or the 'decolonial imaginary' described by Walter Mignolo underlined the manifold ways in which the imaginary is mobilised to both analyse and initiate different forms of 'world forming'. The chapter points to the ways in which the political imaginary intersects with *Rewinding Internationalism*, or can be used as a heuristic device to consider frames and operations within the exhibition: the back and forth between signifiers and events in the world, the emphasis on the form, or 'landscape' of a political imaginary, the means in which the imaginary shapes and is shaped by the state and the

nation, as well as how it has been used to analyse globalisation and the realignment of geopolitics during the 1990s, the starting point for *Rewinding Internationalism*. Here, the political imaginary is put forward as something to 'pick up', not as a fully formed construct, but as a device to work through the (re)calibration of registers in regards to discourse on exhibitions.

In 'A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*', I return to exhibition practice, offering a form of walk through of the exhibition. Wary of 'mapping' a reading of the exhibition solely in relation to the political imaginary, as well as wanting to further develop the vocabularies around exhibition methodologies in 'Beyond Representing Ideology', the chapter focuses on the forms, spatiality and contents of the exhibition, that can be read in dialogue with observations in the previous chapters. It concentrates on how the exhibition operates as both a site of analysis and evocation that has parallels with the political imaginary while foregrounding its formal and spatial conditions. Evocation occurs through scenographic choices, movement through the exhibition and the interplay between abstraction and signification that resists 'representing' imaginaries but rather aids in bringing them into being. At the same time the close reading aims to unfold internationalism as political imaginary itself, across time and space, in multiple and parallel manifestations. The chapter highlights how the exhibition becomes a site of inquiry *through* its process and operations.

Exhibitions and uses of the political imaginary entangle signs with lived experience, a political project or an ideological stance. Yet both slip through, sidestep, having to be accounted for in the here and now. They operate in a parallel space, or parallel spaces that shift between political urgencies, mapping contexts and speculative possibilities without having to resolve incongruencies between them. Such spaces of 'speculation' and 'possibility' are often critiqued for being 'too good to be true', of not having 'leverage' in the world while mirroring the vocabularies and tactics of finan-

cialisaton.[3] That position presumes that what is being addressed or put forward is some sort of idealised future, where the speculative is a stand in for the utopic. The exhibition-as-imaginary that this project infers functions as a space of critical analysis while pointing towards possible futures and 'potential histories'. Significantly, as *Rewinding Internationalism* demonstrates, different forms and uses of imaginaries can coalesce and be experienced together. By the same token the imaginary, as Said and decolonial thinkers make clear, is not exclusively future-oriented. It is often used to locate and sometimes codify a historical period, or as an instrument of oppression. My concern has not been to fix the imaginary as either future or historically facing, or as having to incapsulate ether utopian or dystopian visions. In fact, *Rewinding Internationalism*, reveals the fluidity of the imaginary, or an internationalist imaginary, to move across contexts and time frames, as well as showing its many facets across subjective, situated and statist forms. The space of the exhibition, the interplay between materials and forms of encounter create the conditions for this exploration to happen.

The principal task of this project has been to investigate the relationship between exhibitions, processes of inquiry and the political. This document, and the accompanying submission, demonstrate how this has taken place through research actions – conference organising, editing, writing and, most centrally, exhibition making. As I state at the outset, this document brings the project to a form of 'arbitrary closure' to borrow Hall's term in relation to theories of articulation. Further developing the project's core research task could take place through multiple lines of inquiry. Firstly, conducting a number of close readings of exhibitions – for example returning to those I analysed in 'Approaching Research – Exhibition Practices' and their use of different forms of historical analysis – to attend more closely to their formal, spatial and 'topographical' specificities.

3   B. el Baroni, 'Whither the Exhibition in the Age of Finance?', 98 – 99.

In keeping with some of this document's opening observations, the close reading remains an underdeveloped form in curatorial discourse that could aid in a renewed focus on the operations of exhibitions. This project has drawn on the political imaginary in relation to the specificity of a single project and the context of the 1990s. Extending the work on the political imaginary as a device to rebalance onto-epistemological and operational registers could entail attending closely to a range of research-exhibition practices (in both the focus of projects and their operational strategies) where different imaginaries are evoked, to ascertain the political imaginary's potential and limits as a 'heuristic device'. Specifically, I would be keen to conduct these inquiries in relation to a range of organisational and geo-political contexts. From the perspective of my own exhibition practice, I can imagine deepening the insights of this project through curatorial investigations into different political imaginaries. The future – as a trans-historical imaginary itself that has occupied writers, artists and political actors alike – seems to offer fertile ground in this regard. At the same time, I am keen to experiment with different 'topographical' forms of exhibition display and mediation, where there is a more overt recalibration between an object of inquiry (a historical conjuncture or a term) and the spatial, scenographic and experiential. Here, focus could be placed on the sonic as nonrepresentational device and as a mechanism for abstraction within research-exhibition practices.

Over more than five years this investigation has continually intersected with my professional work as a museum curator. I have used the conjunctural nature of the project – multiple contexts and formats being brought to bear on its trajectory – to reprioritise the operational register of exhibitions in considering its relationship to processes of inquiry and the political. The project has taken place *through* varied operations and involving multiple relations – steering and informing the research task, ultimately becoming the focus of the project and leading to its central claim.

Internationalism från ett annat håll:
En undersökning av politiska föreställningsvärldar
genom utställningsskapande

Denna forskningsöversikt av doktorsavhandlingen
"*Rewinding Internationalism*: An Exhibitionary Inquiry
into the Political Imaginary" är en av flera delar som
lämnats in för doktorsexamination. Denna översikt
har till uppgift att 1) sammanfatta forskningsprojektet,
2) guida läsaren genom materialet och dess funktion
inom det övergripande projektet samt 3) formulera en
reflektion över arbetet, samt att avslutningsvis före-
slå vidare forskningsfrågor. Materialet består av tre
publikationer, av vilka två är förhållandevis fristående
böcker publicerade i samband med olika versioner
av den för undersökningen centrala utställningen,
Rewinding Internationalism (2023). Den tredje publi-
kationen består av essäer, intervjuer och redaktionella
introduktioner som publicerats eller skrivits under
projektets gång och som har varit viktiga för hur forsk-
ningsfrågan utvecklats. Därutöver föreligger digital
dokumentation som rör utställningarna och som är
tillgänglig online.[1] Det är genom detta sammanlagda
material som forskningsprojektet bidrar till fältet för
kuratoriell praktik.

Doktorsavhandlingen både springer ur och härbärgeras
av min egen praktik, och syftar till att artikulera huru-
vida relationen mellan genomförandet av en utställ-
ning, dess undersökningsprocesser och den politiska
sfären (med alla dess skilda modaliteter och former)
kan förstås som ömsesidigt generativa. Projektet
fokuserar i synnerhet på de faktorer som är aktive-
rade i genomförandet av en utställning, hur utställ-
ningen arbetar och hur dess processer ser ut; dess
rumsliga, formella och erfarenhetsmässiga möjligheter.
Eftersom dessa faktorer både kan facilitera under-
sökningar och gå i politisk dialog, syftar projektet till

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1   http://hdl.handle.net/2077/78835

att bidra till den befintliga men relativt begränsade diskursen inom detta område.

Den breda terräng som dessa tre relaterade ramverk (utställningen, undersökningen och den politiska sfären) tecknar upp kan grovt sett förstås som en diskurs om kuratoriella praktiker som, sedan 1990-talet, har vuxit fram i en alltmer globaliserad konstvärld som består av utställningar, institutioner och biennaler.[2] Några av de principiella linjerna eller gränsdragningarna i denna debatt är tidiga påståenden och tankar om kuratoriella praktiker som politisk och epistemologisk process, vilken är något annat än och avskilt från det mer praktiskt orienterande utställningsmakandet. Andra viktiga inslag i den kuratoriella diskursen är utvecklingen av den så kallade "forskningsutställningen" som genre, och nyligen genomförda experiment inom utställnings-skapande som öppet motsätter sig idén att represen-tera någon ideologi.[3] På senare tid har ett nytt fokus

på utställningen uppstått både diskursivt och genom specifika praktiker, som i stort sett skiljer mellan de "onto-epistemologiska" påståenden som görs om utställningar i mer allmänna termer och den detalje-rade diskussionen om en utställnings praktiska "verksamhetsfält", som ofta undersöks genom spe-cifika fallstudier.[4] Detta projekt tar hänsyn till, och befinner sig i, ett sammanhang som utgörs av dessa diskussioner och praktiker. Det bygger på insikten om en obalans inom diskursen, som genom en över-betoning på det onto-epistemologiska bortser från utställningsskapandets många operativa moment: dess strategier för analys såväl som dess specifika rumsliga, scenografiska och erfarenhetsmässiga potentialer. Projektets huvudsakliga bidrag till fältet ligger i ett förslag på en annan viktning av dessa två register – det onto-epistemologiska och det operationella – i relationen mellan utställningar, undersökningsprocesser och den politiska sfären. Genom en utvecklandets praktik och dess särdrag (i synnerhet förverkligandet av den stora vandrande utställningen *Rewinding Internationalism*) föreslår projektet en komplex *interaktion* mellan dessa register och lyfter fram hur utställningsskapandet iscensätter och instansierar en undersökningsprocess, samtidigt som det ingriper i den politiska sfären.

2   Detta "globaliserade" tillstånd är inte föreslaget här som en enkel monolitisk "ny världsordning", utan som en mycket omdiskuterad och mångfaldig uppsättning asymmetriska sammanhang och strukturer.

3   Dessa debatter är fokuset för kapitlet "Beyond Representing Ideology" i det här dokumentet. Diskursen om kuratoriella praktiker utvecklades under 2000-talet i samband med att ett antal dokto-randprogram etablerades. En viss diskurs om det kuratoriella växte framförallt fram vid europeiska universitet och förlag. Ett litet urval vägledande texter och redigerade volymer inkluderar bland annat Paul O'Neill, "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse", *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, Bristol: Intellect, 2007, 13–28; Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck (red.), *Cultures of the curatorial*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012; Jean-Paul Martinon (red.), *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, London: Bloomsbury, 2013; Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham, (red.), *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media*, Massachusetts, MA: MIT, 2010; P. O'Neill (red.), *Curating Subjects*, Amsterdam: De Appel/Open Editions, 2007. Utöver detta uppstod en utökad diskurs om kuratoriella praktiker som svarade mot konstvärldens expansion under 1990-talet via figurer som Viktor Misiano som producerade den första ryskspråkiga volymen om kuratoriella praktiker. Se Viktor Misiano, *Five Lectures on Curatorship*, Moscow: Garage Publishing Program/Ad Marginem Press, 2015. Andra betydelsefulla bidrag till diskursen om kuratoriella praktiker inkluderar kollektivet What, How & For Whom/WHW vilka har omformulerat både kuratoriella praktiker och utställningsproduk-tioner genom att kräva att man tar hänsyn till de ekonomiska och arbetsmässiga villkoren som är underförstådda i konceptualiseringen och förverkligandet av utställningar. En viktig manifestation av detta

kuratoriella tillvägagångssätt var den elfte istanbulbiennalen: *What Keeps Mankind Alive?*, 2009. Zdenka Badovinacs ledarskap på Moderna galerija i Ljubljana har varit avgörande i hur det kuratoriella fältet har utvecklats och den roll institutioner spelat i att förändra det geopolitiska landskapet under 1990-talet. Se Zdenka Badovinac, *Comradeship: Curating, Art and Politics in Post-Socialist Europe*, New York: Independent Curators International, 2019. Viktiga bidrag till diskursen om kuratoriella praktiker från ett postkolonialt perspektiv har lagts fram av Okwui Enwezors documenta11 från 2002. Se Okwui Enwezor (red.), *Documenta11: Platform 5,* Ostfildem-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2002. På senare tid har kuratorn Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung utforskat kuratoriellt arbete och den kuratoriella formen utifrån ett soniskt och kroppsligt perspektiv. Se hans essäsamling *In a While or Two We Will Find the Tone: Essays and Proposals, Curatorial Concepts and Critiques,* Berlin: Archive Books, 2020.

4   Se Nick Aikens, Kjell Caminha, Jyoti Mistry and Mick Wilson (red.), *PARSE*, no.13, *On the Question of Exhibition*, Part 2, summer 2021, https://parsejournal.com/article/editorial-4/.

Projektet genomför denna ombalansering på ett antal olika sätt. Först och främst genom att identifiera och göra bruk av analytiska strategier (deras funktioner och former) från olika fält som kan vara användbara i arbetet med forsknings-utställningspraktiker. Dessa introduceras i kapitlet "Beyond Representing Ideology" och återkommer i efterföljande kapitel, vilka fokuserar på utställnings-projektet *Rewinding Internationalism*. För det andra, och huvudsakligen, verkar projektet genom denna långvariga utställnings överlappande utgångspunk-ter, förlopp och fysiska instanser, vilka står i fokus för två av kapitlen i detta dokument: "*Rewinding Internationalism:* Processes and Operations" och "A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationlism*". Projektets multipla *operationer* driver på forsknings-processen, i vilken utställningen fungerar som en plats både för analys och frammaningar. För det tredje genomför projektet denna ombalansering inom ramen för den politiska föreställningsvärlden, som kartläggs i kapitel tre, "The Political Imaginary as Heuristic Device" och som mobiliseras i förhål-lande till utställningen som fenomen i kapitlet "A Close Reading".

Den politiska föreställningsvärlden formuleras i projektet som å ena sidan ett studieobjekt och å andra sidan ett verktyg för att kunna förhandla för-hållandet mellan en utställning, en forsknings-process och den politiska sfären. "Den politiska föreställningsvärlden" (eng: "the political imaginary") är en konstruktion inom sociologi, antropologi och politisk teori som alltmer har börjat cirkulera inom konstvärlden. Termens varierande användning hos en rad tänkare som Cornelius Castoriadis, Benedict Anderson, Edward Said, Walter Mignolo och Catherine Walsh samt Arjun Appadurai visar att den politiska föreställningsvärlden, som begrepp, är en formbar konstruktion som används för att beskriva och analysera alltifrån nationalism, till orien-talism, dekolonialitet och sociala processer inom

ramen för globalisering.[5] Författare som Susan Buck-Morss och Marc Neocleous betonar dess *formella* karaktär och beskriver begreppet som en "terräng" eller ett "landskap" genom vilket politiska aktörer, idéer och relationer verkar. De använder det fram-för allt för att kartlägga 1990-talets skiftande geo-politiska sammanhang och kalla krigets slut, vilket också är den tidsmässiga inramningen för *Rewinding Internationalism*. Jag går vidare till begreppet den poli-tiska föreställningsvärldens olika tillämpningar – dess förmåga att analysera och frammana sociala relatio-ner, dess förhållande till tecken och representation, och hur det kan betraktas som ett rumsligt "landskap" som hjälper en att navigera i de många utställnings-register som överlappar varandra. Projektet använder den politiska föreställningsvärlden som ett verktyg för att undersöka hur utställningars operativa och onto-epistemologiska register ömsesidigt påverkar varandra, snarare än att vara separata eller avgränsade från varandra.

Även om användningen av den politiska föreställningsvärlden bygger på diverse författa-res arbete kommer den huvudsakliga förståelsen av begreppet i detta projekt från den process som kan kallas utställningsskapande-som-undersökning. Forskningen startade inte med målet att söka upp och definiera den politiska föreställningsvärlden som koncept. Snarare plockar projektet upp teoretiska konstruktioner och metodologier i olika skeden med utgångspunkt i artikulationsteori. De utställningar som har genererats i projektet ska inte betraktas som illustrationer av olika sätt som begreppet den

5   Kapitlet "The Political Imaginary" går igenom dessa tänkares olika användning av begreppet. Men se Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, London: Polity Press, 1987 och Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1983; Edward Saids begrepp om föreställd geografi är central i *Orientalism,* London: Panteon Books, 1978. Se även Walter Mignolo och Catherine Walsh (red.), *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Annaytics, Praxis,* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018 och Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, London and Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

politiska föreställningsvärlden har tillämpats. Under forskningsprocessen har snarare paralleller mellan utställningsskapandet och den politiska föreställnings-världen identifierats. Både utställningen som sådan och den politiska föreställningsvärlden opererar som analytiska verktyg *och* det som Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar beskriver som förslag till "världsformande".[6] Det är just förmågan att analysera samtidigt som man lägger fram världsformande förslag som skapar en viktig skärningspunkt där utställningsskapande, forskningsprocesser och den politiska föreställnings-världen möts. Analys och spekulation kan hänföras till olika litterära eller filmiska genrer, som till exempel afrofuturismens föreställningsvärldar och dess analys av rasifierad kapitalism.[7] Det som detta projekt sätter fokus på är de särskilda möjligheter som utställnings-skapande ger och de operativa processer som bär upp detta arbete och som jag anser är underutveck-lade i beskrivningar av det utställningsmässiga.[8]

<center>Projektets narrativ</center>

Under fem år har projektet utgjorts av ett antal forskningsmoment – presentationer på konferenser, anordnandet av konferenser, publicering, redaktionella projekt och, främst, framställandet av utställningar. Essäer och intervjuer som är gjorda i relation till dessa moment ingår också i det inlämnade materialet och erbjuder läsaren olika infallsvinklar till projektet. Under dessa fem år har projektet, som en följd av dessa moment, omformulerats och omkontextualise-

rats. Doktorsavhandlingen formulerades initialt – och då under rubriken "Articulation, the curatorial and decolonising the institution" – som ett försök att se hur artikulationsteorier, såsom dessa hade utvecklats inom fältet för kulturvetenskap av Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, Chantal Mouffe med flera, kunde tillämpas på en utvidgad förståelse av kuratori-ella praktiker.[9] Under första året omformulerades projektet under rubriken "Practice-led research into the concepts of nationalisms and internationalism operative in political imaginaries in sites within the art system. The 1990s and the present. "Redan denna olyckliga och långrandiga titel signalerar de svårighe-ter som processen att omformulera projektet innebar. Forskningsprojektet genomgick en förflyttning från ett försök att tillämpa en teoretisk matris (artikulation) till kuratoriella praktiker (inom ett projekt som är uttalat ideologiskt, nämligen i fråga om att dekolonisera institutioner) till att vara ett praktikbaserat projekt (i kontrast till ett projekt som tillämpar en teori på praktiken) med ett klart definierat tema (nationalismer och internationalismer) och en specifik historisk ram (1990-talet). Bakom denna förändring ligger ett antal arbeten som ingår i det slutliga materialet, nämligen arbetet skriva artikeln "Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary observations" och essän "A Complex Unity: Articulating the 1990s" som ingick i volymen *The Place is Here: The Work of Black Artists in 1980s Britain* (Sternberg Press, 2019), som jag var medredaktör för. Båda texterna, liksom inledningen till *The Place is Here*, som beskri-ver publikationen som resultatet av en flerårig pro-cess som kretsade kring fyra utställningar som jag

6   Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, 'Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction', *Public Culture*, vol.14, no.1, December 2002, 1–19.

7   Jag tänker särskilt på Octavia E. Butlers skrivande och hennes *Xenogeneis* (1997) och serien *Lillith's Brood* (2000)

8   Inom kuratoriella diskurser har utställningar på nytt hamnat i fokus. Tidigare har fokus legat på "utställningsverktyg" eller "ideologiska infra-strukturer" i mer generella och ofta abstrakta termer. Se till exempel Tristan Garcia och Vincent Normand (red.), *Theatre Garden Bestiary. A Materialist History of Exhibitions*, Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2019. Även om en del av publikationen ägnas åt "The Exhibition Fro m" finns det få detaljerade diskussioner om specifika rumsliga praktiker och operatio-ner inom specifika utställningar.

9   Aritkulationsteorier är fokuset för essän "Theories of Articulation and the Curatorial: Some Preliminary Observations" i det inlämnade materi-alet där referenser till ett antal texter går att finna. Däremot finns en utomordentlig sammanfattning av artikulationsteorier och deras bety-delse för kulturstudier skriven av Jennifer Slack i hennes essä "The Theory and Method of Articulation in Cultural Studies", i David Morley och Kuan-Hsing Chen (red.), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 112–27.

var kurator för, ingår i det material som inlämnats för doktorsexamination.

Halvvägs in i doktorandprocessen hade projektet fått sin nuvarande titel "Rewinding Internationalism: An Exhibitionary Inquiry on the Political Imaginary", och utställningen, som forskningsresultat, gick från att vara ett underordnat element eller ett enkelt resultat till att bli undersökningens centrala plats och dess agent. Utställningen som forskningsplats, benämnandet av befintliga kuratoriella utställningspraktiker som forskning och formulerandet av en mer specifik språkanvändning för forsknings- och utställningsstrategier hade kommit att uppta en allt större del av projektet.

I den redaktionella introduktionen till andra delen av *PARSE: On the Question of Exhibition*, ett nummer som jag var medredaktör för och som ingår i det framlagda materialet, identifierades två olika utställningsregister: "utställningars tekniker för världsskapande och ordnande, det som vi i bred bemärkelse kan kalla dess *onto-epistemologiska register*" och "utställningsapparatens pragmatiska och tekniska frågor, eller dess *operationella register*". I takt med att forskningsprojektet utvecklades blev identifieringen av dessa två register avgörande för hur det skulle konceptualiseras. Diskursen om utställningar, särskilt när det gäller undersökande processer och den politiska sfären, har överbetonat det onto-epistemologiska registret. Genom att arbeta med utställningspraktikens särdrag gör detta projekt anspråk på en ombalansering, en förståelse för hur utställningars processer och operationer sammanfaller och påverkar en utställnings förmåga att producera kunskap, på samma gång som det håller fast vid utställningars status och självförståelse som just *utställning*.

Många av observationerna som gjorts under arbetet med *PARSE*, liksom relaterade aktiviteter (konferensen "Transmitting, Documenting, Narrating", och ett samtal med kuratorn Nav Haq om hans utställning *Monocultures: A Recent History*, M HKA, Antwerpen, 2021), tillsammans med en bredare redo-

görelse för en förståelse av förhållandet mellan forskningspraktiker och utställningen som fenomen (både gällande diskurs och utställningspraktik) framkommer i essän "Approaching Research Exhibition Practice", publicerad i *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*.[10] Texten för samman undersökningens olika spår, vilka också tas upp på nytt och utvecklas i kapitlet "Beyond Representing Ideology". Den identifierar också strategier eller metoder för forskningsutställningspraktiker som är engagerade i den politiska sfären. Mikrohistorier, som utvecklats inom socialantropologi, konjunkturanalys från kulturstudier, användningen av "kritiska fabuleringar" som myntats av socialhistorikern Saidiya Hartman och "potentiell historia" av teoretikern och konstnären Ariella Aïsha Azoulay läggs alla fram som möjliga vägar för hur man kan närma sig forskningsutställningspraktiker. Därutöver förekommer spekulationer om framtida strategier i texten.

Parallellt med att skriva, redigera och anordna konferenser har mitt arbete som kurator med utställningsprojekt vid Van Abbemuséet både direkt och indirekt främjat forskningsprojektet. Att handleda konstnären och performanceartisten Yael Davids forskningsprojekt *A Daily Practice* (2016-2020) har till exempel varit formativt för mina tankeprocesser i relation till utställningar utifrån flera infallsvinklar (utställningar som montering, som komposition, som studier etc, vilket beskrivs i essän 'A Daily Practice: An Exhibition As ...', som är del i det inlämnade materialet. Några av dessa överväganden ledde, 2020, till utställningsprojektet *Rewinding Internationalism*, vilken också ingår i det inlämnade materialet i form av två publikationer och en digital mapp med dokumentation. Utställningen, samt den preliminära versionen av den som gjordes på Netwerk Aalst (öppning februari 2022),

10   Essän förekommer i Cătălin Gheorghe och Mick Wilson (red.), *Exhibitionary Acts of Political Imagination*, ett nummer av *Vector – critical research in context*, Iași, Romania och Gothenburg: Artes och ArtMonitor (Göteborgs universitet), 2022, 96–103.

följt av utökade versioner på Van Abbemuséet (öppning november 2023) och Villa Arson, Nice (öppning juni 2023) utgör en väsentlig del av forskningsprojektet. Dess utveckling och förverkligande i förbindelse med skrivandet, redigeringen och sammankomsterna gör att utställningen inte blir ett resultat, en demonstration eller en representation av diskursiva aktiviteter, utan att den ligger till grund för projektets centrala anspråk på att ombalansera de onto-epistemologiska och operativa register genom vilka utställningar förstås. Utställningsprojektet inleddes med en önskan om att utforska begreppet internationalism och navigera genom dess historiska återklang i 1900-talets frigörelsekamper. Inom ramen för den europeiska museikonfederationen L'Internationale, och i ett samtida sammanhang som genomsyras av splittringspolitik (både inom och utanför Europa), ställdes bland annat följande frågor: Hur kan Van Abbemuséets position inom ett museinätverk som orienterar sig i en internationalistisk, socialistisk historisk kamp, vara en plats där betydelsen av denna "internationalism" kan utforskas ur ett samtida perspektiv? Hur kan detta drivas av utställningsskapandets själva process och form? Utställningen, inklusive processerna att bestämma innehåll, struktur och form, gav möjlighet att i praktiken undersöka förhållandet mellan utställningsskapande, kuratoriella praktiker och dess anspråk på den politiska sfären.

<center>Introduktion till kapitlen</center>

Dokumentets fyra kapitel är modulära och behöver inte läsas i följd. I likhet med *Rewinding Internationalisms* utställningslogik kan man genom att läsa dem i den ordning man själv föredrar förhoppningsvis skapa olika betydelser och relationer, samtidigt som man behåller undersökningens centrala inriktning. Den som till exempel börjar med en närläsning av *Rewinding Internationalism* och sedan går vidare till de kontextuella debatterna i kapitel ett får andra insikter än den

som börjar med en kartläggning av fältet och sedan går vidare till hur utställningars operationer och processer ser ut.

"Beyond Representing Ideology" placerar denna undersökning i den kontext som utgörs av debatter om utställningen som sådan, forskningsprocesser och politiska frågor såsom de utspelas inom kuratoriella diskurser, samt i vidare diskussioner om konstnärlig forskning. Kapitlet placerar projektet som en del av ett förnyat fokus på det utställningsmässiga, men identifierar ändå vad jag ser som en lucka i beskrivningen av de operationer som kännetecknar utställningsskapande.

"Rewinding Internationalism: Operations and Processes" ramar in utställningsprojektet, dess utgångspunkter, operativa processer och förverkligande i kölvattnet av utställningens tredje iscensättande. Syftet här är att i detalj beskriva hur forskningsuppgiften genomfördes *i* praktiken, och att namnge de operationer samt formella, rumsliga beslut som låg till grund för processen. Särskild vikt läggs vid scenografin, så som den utvecklades i relation till utställningsversionen vid Van Abbemuséet, och i samarbete med scenografen Natascha Leonie Simons.

"*The Political Imaginary*" introducerar, som titeln antyder, den politiska föreställningsvärlden, ett begrepp som används för att navigera förhållandet mellan utställningen som sådan, forskningsprocesser och den politiska sfären. Begreppet "föreställningsvärld" inom antropologi, sociologi och politisk teori används som ett heuristiskt hjälpmedel, snarare än ett komplett teoretiskt ramverk, i synnerhet för att förstå föreställningar om "staten" och "nationen". Kapitlet riktar uppmärksamhet mot författare och begrepp som inte ingår i den senaste tidens etablerade genealogier av begreppet, bland andra Saids "imaginär geografi". Kapitlet avslutas med en genomgång av hur den politiska föreställningsvärlden har plockats upp i konstvärlden. Därmed placeras denna utställning i dialogisk relation till andra utövare, bland andra Simon Sheikh.

"The Exhibition, Internationalism and the Political Imaginary: A Close Reading of *Rewinding Internationalism*" är en genomgång av Rewinding Internationalism som utforskar hur utställningen och internationalism och den politiska föreställningsvärldens som konstruktioner samspelar och ger varandra mening. Kapitlet lägger ut texten om hur forskningsutställningsprocessen har gett upphov till en förståelse av den politiska föreställningsvärlden som ett koncept som i egen rätt både kan analysera och frammana internationalism. Vidare försöker kapitlet beskriva en serie knutar som gör att *Rewinding Internationalisms* forskningsutställningsprocess skapar insikter om projektets ramverk, internationalism och undersökningsprocessen. Den politiska föreställningsvärlden, som verktyg och föresats, används för att förhandla eller röra sig mellan utställningen, forskningsprocesserna och den politiska sfären.

Stuart Hall, sannolikt den mest framstående tänkaren inom kulturstudier, beskriver sina analyser eller interventioner inom diskurser som ögonblick av "godtyckliga avslut" där observationer och slutsatser sammanförs i en konstellation. Dessa konstellationer är dock inte fastställda för all framtid utan redo att öppnas upp, utvidgas och omkonfigureras när förhållandena förändras och analysen behöver återanpassas.

Jag avrundar den här texten genom att luta mig mot Halls begrepp om godtyckliga avslut, där olika steg och processer i texten har återbesökts – inklusive den nuvarande versionen av utställningen *Rewinding Internationalism* som visas i Villa Arson Nice i skrivande stund. Därmed betonas denna undersökning som en analys-i-process och utan tvekan en analys-genom-praktik. Genom att förstå, föreslå och artikulera en position som bearbetats och "är på väg", tar denna text plats i ett givet politiskt sammanhang, men kanske ännu viktigare, genom de skiftande konturerna i själva den kuratoriella praktiken.

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