

THE CURATORIAL

A Philosophy of Curating

Edited by

Jean-Paul Martinon



B L O O M S B U R Y

The Curatorial

Also available from Bloomsbury

Art and Institution, Rajiv Kaushik

The Curatorial

A Philosophy of Curating

Edited by Jean-Paul Martinon

B L O O M S B U R Y
LONDON • NEW DELHI • NEW YORK • SYDNEY

Bloomsbury Academic

An imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

50 Bedford Square	1385 Broadway
London	New York
WC1B 3DP	NY 10018
UK	USA

www.bloomsbury.com

Bloomsbury is a registered trade mark of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

First published 2013

© Jean-Paul Martinon and Contributors, 2013

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

Jean-Paul Martinon has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Editor of this work.

No responsibility for loss caused to any individual or organization acting on or refraining from action as a result of the material in this publication can be accepted by Bloomsbury Academic or the author.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

eISBN: 978-1-4725-2316-7

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The curatorial : a philosophy of curating / edited by Jean-Paul Martinon.
pages cm

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4725-2560-4 (hardcover : alk. paper) –

ISBN (invalid) 978-1-4725-3361-6 (ebook (epub)) – ISBN 978-1-4725-2316-7 (ebook (pdf))

1. Curatorship–Philosophy. 2. Art museums–Philosophy.

N410.C8697 2013

727'.701–dc23

2013024805.

Typeset by Newgen Knowledge Works (P) Ltd., Chennai, India

Contents

List of Illustrations	vii
Preface <i>Jean-Paul Martinon</i> and <i>Irit Rogoff</i>	viii
Notes on Contributors	xii
Introduction <i>Jean-Paul Martinon</i>	1
Part I Send-Offs	
1 On the Curatorial, From the Trapeze <i>Raqs Media Collective</i>	17
2 Theses in the Philosophy of Curating <i>Jean-Paul Martinon</i>	25
3 Whence the Future? <i>Alfredo Cramerotti</i> and <i>Jean-Paul Martinon</i>	35
4 The Expanded Field <i>Irit Rogoff</i>	41
5 Dear Art, Yours Sincerely <i>Natasa Ilić (WHW)</i>	49
Part II Praxeologies	
6 The Curator Crosses the River: A Fabulation <i>Stefan Nowotny</i>	59
7 Becoming-Curator <i>Suzana Milevska</i>	65
8 An Exhausted Curating <i>Leire Vergara</i>	73
9 Eros, Plague, Olfaction: Three Allegories of the Curatorial <i>Jenny Doussan</i>	79
Part III Moves	
10 The Task at Hand: Transcending the Clamp of Sovereignty <i>Ariella Azoulay</i>	93
11 The Simple Operator <i>Sarah Pierce</i>	97
12 Three Short Takes on the Curatorial <i>Doreen Mende</i>	105
13 Aku menjadi saksi kepada – What I am Thinking <i>Roopesh Sitharan</i>	109
14 Betrayal and the Curatorial – A Testimony for the Committee on the Curatorial <i>Joshua Simon</i>	115

Part IV Heresies

- 15 A Conspiracy without a Plot *Stefano Harney and
Valentina Desideri* 125
- 16 What does a Question Do? Micropolitics and
Art Education *Susan Kelly* 137
- 17 Being Able to Do Something *Nora Sternfeld* 145
- 18 The Politics of Residual Fun *Valeria Graziano* 151

Part V Refigurations

- 19 Modern Art: Its Very Idea and the Time/Space of
the Collection *Helmut Draxler* 163
- 20 Two Invoking Media: Radio and Exhibition *Jean-Louis Déotte* 169
- 21 In Unfamiliar Terrain Preliminary Notes towards
Site-Relationality and the Curatorial *Anshuman Dasgupta* 173
- 22 Curating Ghostly Objects: Counter-Memories in
Cinematic Space *Cihat Arinç* 183
- 23 Non-Museums *Adnan Madani* 197

Part VI Stages

- 24 Curating, Dramatization and the Diagram:
Notes towards a Sensible Stage *Bridget Crone* 207
- 25 Curating Context *Aneta Szyłak* 215
- 26 Backstage and Processuality: Unfolding the Installation
Sites of Curatorial Projects *Ines Moreira* 225
- 27 This Is Not About Us *Je Yun Moon* 235

Coda: The Curatorial *Charles Esche* 241

Bibliography 245

Index 253

Illustrations

10.1	Presentation of the archive <i>From Palestine to Israel</i> at Zochrot Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2009	93
14.1	Front page of the Israeli newspaper <i>Maariv</i> featuring Ariel Kleiner's <i>Guillotine</i> installed on Rothschild Boulevard, Tel Aviv, 11 August 2011	116
17.1	<i>Not Doing Everything</i> , Poster, Buenos Aires, 2004 by the Argentinian collective etcetera	145
21.1	Installation view of the <i>Alien Nation Project</i> with participants and viewers, Rhenok, Sikkim, 2011	173
26.1	Stills from Telmo Domingues's documentary, 'Making of the Exhibition Buildings & Remnants'	225

Preface

Curatorial/Knowledge PhD Programme, Goldsmiths College

We wish to talk about curating: about its potentials and its scopes.

We wish to talk about curating: about the knowledges it builds on and the knowledges it produces.

We wish to talk about curating: about its sociabilities, collectivities and convivialities.

We wish to talk about curating: about its commitments to seeing, reading and speaking and exchanging as a form of public activity.

We wish to talk about curating: because it has been seeking novel ways of instantiating the crises of our world in other modalities, of finding other ways to engage with our current woes.

We wish to talk about curating, because we thought we saw a possibility nestling within its protocols, a possibility for other ways of working, relating and knowing.

This wish of ours to talk about curating led us to institute a space of gathering, a practice-led PhD programme in 2006 called Curatorial/Knowledge to which many young curators and artists have come to share in the discussion and embark on their own investigations. Our friends and colleagues from many different arenas have also come along and held seminars and discussed their complex practices and intricate thought processes.

At the very beginning, six years ago, someone said half-jokingly, 'our project is to stop people curating!' and some weeks later someone else said, a bit more vehemently: 'so are we agreed that this programme is not about becoming better curators?' With hindsight, these were actually statements of considerable substance, which recognized that the proliferation of curatorial activities, courses, residencies and prizes has led to massive activity, driven by energy and an enthusiasm for displays and events, much of which is less than fully considered. It also recognizes that all this activity is not founded on a solid intellectual basis that might empower its practitioners to have the critical courage to resist

demands to simply supply more and more excitement to a market ravenous for spectacle and entertainment.

It has always been our desire to enter the discussion as ‘provocateurs’ rather than as ‘experts’ – we have understood that historical and other expertise is easily converted into the legitimization of market-driven spectacles and therefore cannot provide the self-reflexive speculation we continue to think the field requires if it is to become more than a series of professional protocols.

Alongside these market-driven spectacles a whole gamut of curatorial activities take place, calling into question what it is that is really taking place underneath all this glitter. These activities have taken many shapes: for example, we have seen the entry of the pedagogical into the field under the aegis of ‘the educational turn’, the (re)animation of abandoned sites and the (re-)infiltration of existing institutions, and we have also witnessed a strong insistence on talking, conversing, discussing and reading, activities that are in themselves often understood as the very stuff of what it is to make things visible, legible and relevant.

And so our discussions have taken place between these two quite opposite poles of what it means to work in the field, two poles whose differences have become increasingly accentuated – bowing to the expanding market on the one hand and an ever-increasing activist spirit within sectors of the worlds of art and artistic education.

Initially we recognized a necessity to distinguish between ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’. If ‘curating’ is a gamut of professional practices that had to do with setting up exhibitions and other modes of display, then ‘the curatorial’ operates at a very different level: it explores all that takes place on the stage set-up, both intentionally and unintentionally, by the curator and views it as an event of knowledge. So to drive home a distinction between ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’ means to emphasize a shift from the staging of the event to the actual event itself: its enactment, dramatization and performance. ‘Curating’ takes place in a promise; it produces a moment of promise, of redemption to come. By contrast, ‘the curatorial’ is what disturbs this process; it breaks up this stage, yet produces a narrative which comes into being in the very moment in which an utterance takes place, in that moment in which the event communicates and says, as Mieke Bal once observed, ‘look, that is how this is’.

So ‘the curatorial’ is a disturbance, an utterance, a narrative. And within this disturbance, works of art can no longer be a process of interpellation, a conscious or unconscious hailing by some internalized mode of knowledge. Instead, they

engage in another process, that of precipitating our reflection, of encouraging another way of thinking or sensing the world. From being reactive to the world to precipitating another reflection on the world (and inevitably sparking ways to change the world), works of art reflect the myriad ways of being implicated in the world, not just as passive recipients, but as active members of a world that is never one with itself, always out of joint, out of place, but always intrinsically ours – of our own making.

Not wishing to operate within a space of binary oppositions (art vs art history or practice vs theory, for example), we have brought in ‘the philosophical’, not as a master discipline or narrative to explain all, but as a slightly distantiated mode of reflection. This has enabled the introduction of a critical edge that maintains a somewhat sovereign position, detached from the seeming imperatives of everyday demands. The move to ‘the philosophical’ we have affected to enact is not a hierarchical conceit or the privileging of one kind of discipline or practice over another. It is simply the recognition that by bringing some strands of contemporary philosophical and theoretical thought to the discussion of ‘the curatorial’, we open the possibility of reflecting in a way that goes beyond the simple description of projects and experiences. Given the immense expansion of the field and of how central it has become to the visual arts and other modes of cultural practice, it seems to us that it is now imperative to develop a discourse that reaches outwards, beyond the professional milieu, and that allows itself to be challenged by some of the most complex and ethics-driven thought of our times.

We would like to thank all the participants and guests who attended our seminars and the institutions that have hosted us, all of whom continue to contribute to our ongoing discussions. We would particularly like to thank our department at Goldsmiths, Visual Cultures, whose ethos of constant experimentation and testing whatever comes our way has been so hospitable to establishing new programmes that perform the urgencies of the culture we live in. From the moment we established the Curatorial/Knowledge programme, we fell into an ongoing conversation that meandered in many directions and has moved us all, quite unawares, along with it. We probably have not changed the field very significantly, but we have certainly established a conversation about ‘the curatorial’ that has challenged all of us.

What follows includes some of the voices that were heard during the first five years of the programme. This volume does not pretend to be a complete

and authoritative delineation of a body of knowledge but we hope that it will encourage the kind of deconstructive speculation that has been the most productive and enjoyable part of our studies.

Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff
Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College
University of London

Notes on Contributors

Cihat Arinç is independent writer and academic researcher based in London. His research interests focus on memory and global film cultures exploring themes such as haunted subjectivities, auto/biographical narratives, silenced histories and the ruins left by war. He has published a number of essays in edited books and film magazines, and also contributed to art projects and exhibitions in art institutions such as The Serpentine Gallery, Institute of International Visual Arts and The Showroom Gallery, London. He has just completed his PhD entitled *Postcolonial Cyprus on the Haunted Screen: Spectral Realism and the Politics of Remembering in New Turkish Cinema*.

Ariella Azoulay teaches in the Department of Modern Culture and Media and Comparative Literature at Brown University in the USA. Her recent books include: *From Palestine to Israel: A Photographic Record of Destruction and State Formation, 1947–1950*, (Pluto, 2011), *Civil Imagination: The Political Ontology of Photography* (Verso, 2012) and *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Zone, 2008). She is also the co-author with Adi Ophir of *The One State Condition: Occupation and Democracy between the Sea and the River* (Stanford, 2012). She is also a curator and documentary filmmaker. Her recent projects include *Potential History* (2012, Stuk / Artefact, Louven) and *Civil Alliances, Palestine, 47–48* (2012). <http://cargocollective.com/ariellaazoulay>

Alfredo Cramerotti is a writer, curator and editor working across TV, radio, publishing, writing and exhibition making. He co-curated Manifesta 8, the European Biennial of Contemporary Art, 2010, the Maldives Pavilion and the Wales Pavilion at the 55th Venice Art Biennial, 2013. He directs MOSTYN, Wales' leading contemporary art institution, and the itinerant projects AGM Culture and Chamber of Public Secrets. He is Research Scholar at the European Centre for Photography Research, University of Wales, Newport, and Editor of the *Critical Photography* series by Intellect Books. His own publications include the book *Aesthetic Journalism: How to Inform without Informing* (2009).

Bridget Crone is a curator and writer based in London. From 2006–11, she was the director of Media Art Bath – a publicly funded organization dedicated to

commissioning new work in performance and moving image practice. Projects include: *Eye Music for Dancing* (Flat Time House, London, 2012), *The Sensible Stage* (Holburne Museum and various venues, Bath, 2007; Whitechapel Gallery, London, 2008; ICA, London, 2012), *The Body The Ruin* (Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne, 2005). Publications include: *The Sensible Stage: Staging and the Moving Image*, an edited collection addressing the relationships between moving image, performance and theatre (Picture This, 2012). Bridget teaches at Goldsmiths, University of London.

Anshuman Dasgupta is an art historian and curator teaching at the Visva-Bharati University, Santiniketan since 1997. He studied Art History in Santiniketan and M.S University, Baroda and Film Appreciation from F.T.I.I. Pune. Anshuman has published numerous essays for LKC, Marg, Art-India and de Appel. His essays are also part of larger compilations like *Contemporary Sculptures* (Marg, 2000), *Towards a New Art History* (Printworld, 2003), *Art & Visual Cultures in India 1857–2007* (Marg, 2009). Major curatorial projects include *Santhal Family* at MuHKA, Antwerp and *Ramkinkar Baij Centenary Exhibition* at Visva-Bharati in 2006–7. He was organizer and chairperson of Khoj Kolkata in 2006.

Jean-Louis Déotte is Professor of Philosophy at the Université Paris 8. Between 1986 and 1992, he directed a research programme on museums and the patrimony of ruins at the College International de Philosophie in Paris. He has participated in numerous conferences and seminars on the idea of the museum and its role in society. He has published over ten books on art, visual culture, aesthetics and politics, including *Le musée, l'origine de l'esthétique* (1993), *Oubliez! L'Europe, les ruines, le musée* (1995), *Qu'est-ce qu'un appareil? Benjamin, Lyotard, Rancière* (2007) and *Walter Benjamin et la forme plastique* (2012). In English, his latest essay is 'The Museum, a Universal Apparatus', in *Ici et Ailleurs*, 2012 (ici-et-ailleurs.org/spip.php?article27).

Valentina Desideri was best defined by a friend who called her a 20-year-old on tour. Although this was meant as a reproach, she found this definition more suiting than performance artist or anything on that tone. Lately she has also been called a psychic, which now makes of her a psychic 20-year-old on tour. She trained in contemporary dance in London then did a MA in Fine Arts in Amsterdam, she does Fake and Political Therapy, she makes performances, she writes biographies by reading people's palms. She writes other things too but mostly she's around.

Jenny Doussan is a philosopher based in London. She is currently a Visiting Tutor in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London. She

is the author of *Time, Language, and Visuality in Agamben's Philosophy* (Palgrave, 2013); 'Time and Presence in Agamben's Critique of Deconstruction', in *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, 2013 (forthcoming); and 'The Scent of the Jonquil', in *Rattle: A Journal at the Convergence of Art & Writing* 3, London, 2012.

Helmut Draxler is an art historian, art critic, curator and Professor of Art Theory at the Merz Academy in Stuttgart. He was the director of the Kunstverein Munich from 1992 to 1995. In 2004–6 he co-organized the project *Avant-garde Film Biopolitics* at the Jan van Eyck Academy, Maastricht. More recently, Draxler curated the exhibition *Shandyism: Authorship as Genre* at the Secession, Vienna, 2007. He writes extensively on contemporary art and theory for a variety of international magazines and artists' catalogues. Recent publications include: *Film, Avantgarde, Biopolitik* (Schlebrügge, 2009); *Gefährliche Substanzen* (Polyphen, 2007); *Coercing Constellations. Space, Reference, and Representation in Fareed Armaly* (Polyphen, 2007); and *Shandyism. Authorship as Genre* (Secession, 2007).

Charles Esche is a curator and writer based in Scotland. He is director of Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven since 2004 and co-director of *Afterall Journal and Books* based at Central St. Martins College, London since 1998. He has (co-)curated a number of major international exhibitions including: Sao Paulo Bienal (2014); U3 Triennale, Ljubljana (2011); Riwaq Biennale, Ramallah (2007 and 2009); Istanbul Biennale (2005); Gwangju Biennale (2002). He teaches regularly on the Exhibition Studies course at the University of the Arts, London and the De Appel Curatorial Course, Amsterdam. From 2000–4 he was director of Rooseum, Malmö.

Valeria Graziano practises as a researcher, educator and organizer within (and against) contemporary artistic circuits and academia. Some of the items she holds dear include adventures, carrots, schizo-practices, relays and photo-romances. She teaches and is undertaking her PhD at Queen Mary University, London. Her research theorizes the role of radical conviviality emerging within histories of self-organizing, institutional analysis and militant research. She has a penchant for deviceful pedagogical experiments, which she has been breeding with the Micropolitics Research Group (micropolitics.wordpress.com), The Centre for Ethics and Politics (cfep.org.uk) and many other ravishing collaborators over the years.

Stefano Harney is Professor of Strategic Management Education at the Lee Kong Chian School of Business, Singapore Management University and a co-founder of the School for Study. He is the author of *State Work: Public Administration and Mass Intellectuality* (Duke University Press, 2002) and with Fred Moten of *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, published by Autonomedia in 2013. His recent writings include 'Fate Work: A Conversation' with Valentina Desideri, in the journal *Ephemera: Theory and Politics in Organization* (www.ephemerajournal.org).

Natasa Ilić is a curator and critic. She is a member of What, How and for Whom/ WHW, a curatorial collective formed in 1999 and based in Zagreb and Berlin. Its members also include Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Sabina Sabolović and designer Dejan Kršić. WHW organizes a range of exhibitions and publishing projects and runs Gallery Nova, a non-profit, city-owned gallery in Zagreb. Recent WHW exhibitions include *One Needs to Live Self-confidently . . . Watching*, Croatian Pavilion at the 54th Venice Biennial (2011), *Second World*, Steirischer Herbst, Graz (2011), *How much fascism?*, BAK, Utrecht (2012), *Dear Art*, Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (2012). WHW is currently curating the next edition of *Meeting Points*, a multidisciplinary event taking place in various cities in Europe and the Middle East (2013–14).

Susan Kelly is a writer and artist whose research looks at the relationships between art and micropolitics, rhetoric and practices of organization. She works in performance, installation, video, and writes and publishes. She works both independently and collectively with various art-activist groups in London. Over the last ten years, she has shown her work in Belfast, New York, Toronto, Helsinki, Prague, Dublin, St Petersburg, Krasnoyarsk, Tallin, Innsbruck and Zagreb, and has published articles in *re-public art*, *Parallax*, *Journal of Visual Cultures* and elsewhere. In 2012, she was Künstlerhaus Büchsenhausen Fellow in Art and Theory. She currently teaches Fine Art at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Adnan Madani is an artist and writer. Born in Karachi, he graduated from the Indus Valley School of Art and Architecture in 2001. His work has been shown in numerous galleries in Karachi, Dubai, Mumbai and Lahore. He has written widely on Pakistani art, with a focus on the relationship between the artist and the nation. He is a regular contributor to *NuktaArt*, *the Contemporary Art Magazine of Pakistan* (www.nuktaartmag.com). His research interests include contemporary South Asian visual culture, theories of modernity and

contemporaneity. He is currently pursuing a PhD at Goldsmiths, University of London and divides his time between London and Karachi.

Jean-Paul Martinon was the co-founder and curator of Rear Window (www.rear-window.org.uk) an independent arts trust that staged a series of exhibitions and conferences in temporary sites across London. He is currently the Programme Leader of the MPhil-PhD Programme in Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College, University of London. He has written monographs on a Victorian workhouse (*Swelling Grounds*, Rear Window, 1995), the idea of the future in the work of Derrida, Malabou and Nancy (*On Futurity*, Palgrave, 2007), the temporal dimension of masculinity (*The End of Man*, Punctum, 2013) and the concept of peace after the Rwandan genocide (*After 'Rwanda'*, Rodopi, 2013). www.jeanpaulmartinon.net

Doreen Mende is a curator and theorist who lives in Berlin and London. Her practice-based PhD at Goldsmiths addresses the geopolitics of exhibiting. It starts with photography as a practice of solidarity and liberation during the period of socialist internationalism. Its aim is to rethink the potential of exhibition today. As a curator, one of her recent projects include *doubleboundeconomies.net*. She is currently working on an exhibition of KP Brehmer's work for Raven Row in London. She is the co-founder of the magazine *Displayer* at HfG/ZKM Karlsruhe. Since 2010, Mende runs a theory class at the Dutch Art Institute, in The Netherlands.

Suzana Milevska is a theoretician and curator. In 2013 she was appointed the Endowed Professor for Central and South Eastern European Art Histories at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. She holds a PhD in visual culture from the University of London. She lectured at various institutions: Alvar Aalto University Helsinki, Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Oxford University, The Chicago School of Art Institute, Columbia University, IUAV Venice, Akademie der Kunst Berlin, Moderna Museet Stockholm, Tate Modern London, KIASMA Helsinki, MUMOK Vienna, CAMK Japan, etc. In 2010, she published her book *Gender Difference in the Balkans*. In 2012 she won Igor Zabel Award for Culture and Theory and ALICE Award for political curating.

Je Yun Moon is a curator and writer. She lives and works in Seoul and in London. She is currently finishing her PhD at Goldsmiths College, working with the notion of choreography as a particular technology of making and unmaking the modern subject. She studied curatorial studies at the Royal College of Arts and art history at Cornell University. She has worked in various areas of art, architecture

and performance projects, including exhibitions, public programmes, seminars and publications at institutions such as the Sonje Art Center, the Anyang Public Art Project, the Venice Architecture Biennale and the Nam June Paik Art Center, Seoul.

Ines Moreira is an architect, researcher and curator based in Portugal. In 2013, she completed her PhD, an epistemological and processual research on the issues of curating architecture, space and exhibition display, presented under the title *Performing Building Sites: A Curatorial Research on Space*, developed on the Curatorial / Knowledge PhD Programme, Goldsmiths College. Her curatorial projects approach specific spaces (as post-industrial hangars, burnt historical buildings, minor architectures or abandoned museums) exploring knowledge-oriented research/production in the intersection of art, architecture, technoscience and the humanities. www.petitcabanon.org

Stefan Nowotny is a philosopher based in Vienna. He is currently a Lecturer in the Department of Visual Cultures, Goldsmiths College, University of London, where he teaches on the Curatorial / Knowledge PhD Programme. He is a member of the Vienna-based European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (www.eipcp.net). He has published widely on philosophical and political topics, co-edited several anthologies, translated a number of texts from both French and English into German, and co-authored the volumes *Instituierende Praxen: Bruchlinien der Institutionskritik* (with Gerald Raunig, 2008) and *Übersetzung: Das Versprechen eines Begriffs* (with Boris Buden, 2008). He is also a co-editor of the book series *Es kommt darauf an: Texte zur Theorie der politischen Praxis*.

Sarah Pierce is an artist based in Dublin. Since 2003, she has used the term The Metropolitan Complex to describe a practice involving different working methods including performance, self-publishing, workshops and installation. Alongside recent exhibitions and performances, between 2011–13, she was artist-in-residence and guest faculty at the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College, and in 2010 she was a DIVA fellow with the University of Copenhagen where she guest taught on the MA Curating. In 2013–15, she will join the School of Missing Studies as a tutor on the Sandberg Institute's MA in Art and Learning.

Raqs Media Collective enjoys playing a plurality of roles, often appearing as artists, occasionally as curators, sometimes as philosophical agent provocateurs. They make contemporary art, films, exhibitions, books, staged events; often collaborating with architects, computer programmers, writers and theatre directors. Their projects have been exhibited at numerous international venues

including Documenta and the Venice Biennale. The Raqs Media Collective was founded in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta. Raqs remains closely involved with the Sarai programme at the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (www.sarai.net), an initiative they co-founded in 2000. www.raqsmediacollective.net

Irit Rogoff is a writer, curator, and organizer working at the intersection of contemporary art, critical theory and emergent political manifestations. She is Professor of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths, University of London where she heads the PhD in Curatorial / Knowledge programme, MA in Global Arts and the new Geo-Cultures Research Center. Rogoff has written extensively on geography, globalization and contemporary participatory practices in the expanded field of art. A collection of recent essays, *Unbounded – Limits’ Possibilities* (e-flux/Sternberg, 2012) and her new book, *Looking Away – Participating Singularities, Ontological Communities*, comes out in 2013.

Joshua Simon is a curator, writer and filmmaker. He is the Director and Chief Curator of the Museum of Bat Yam, Israel. He is a research fellow at the Vera List Center for Art and Politics at the New School, New York, and co-founding editor of several magazines: *Maayan Magazine for Poetry and Literature*, a magazine dedicated to film, *Maarvon* (which in Hebrew means Western) and *The New & Bad Art Magazine*, all based in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. In 2007, he curated the first Israeli biennial, *The Herzliya Biennial* presenting more than 70 artists. He is the editor of *Solution 196–213 United States of Palestine-Israel* (Sternberg, 2011) and the author of *Neomaterialism* (Sternberg, 2013).

Roopesh Sitharan is an artist, curator, academic and sometimes an explorer of cultural paradigms. He obtained an MFA in Digital Arts and New Media from the University of Santa Cruz and is currently finishing his PhD. His area of specialization is Malaysian studies, New Media cultures and curatorial practices. He often examines the boundaries of meaning and value in the production and interpretation of art and technology. He has participated in numerous national and international art projects and showcases such as those organized by the Inter-Society of Electronic Arts (ISEA), Siggraph and the Gwangju Biennale (2008). www.roopesh.com

Nora Sternfeld is an educator and curator. She is Professor in Curating and Mediating Art at the Aalto University, Helsinki and Co-Director of ECM (Educating/Curating/Managing) Master Programme in exhibition theory and practice at the University of Applied Arts, Vienna. She is part of Trafo. K, Office

for Art Education and Critical Knowledge Production (with Renate Höllwart and Elke Smodics-Kuscher), Vienna. She is also the co-founder and member of the network *Schnittpunkt: Exhibition Theory and Practice* and serves on the editorial board of *Bildpunkt*, the magazine of the Viennese artist association IG Bildende Kunst. She publishes on contemporary art, exhibition theory, education, politics of history and anti-racism.

Aneta Szyłak is a curator, writer, activist, founding director of Wyspa Institute of Art in Gdansk Shipyard and Artistic Director of Alternativa. Her exhibitions are characterized by a strong response towards the cultural, political, social, architectural and institutional specificity. She has been working internationally on exhibitions and public events since 1997. She has lectured at many art institutions and universities, including Copenhagen University, New School University, Dutch Art Institute, Queens College and New York University and worked as a guest professor at the Akademie der Bildende Künste in Mainz, Germany. She has just completed her PhD thesis at Copenhagen Doctoral School Copenhagen University and Goldsmiths College, London.

Leire Vergara is an independent curator from Bilbao. She is a founding member together with Beatriz Cavia, Isabel de Naverán and Miren Jaio of Bulegoa z/b, an independent office for art and knowledge. Between 2002 and 2005, she co-directed, together with Peio Aguirre, the independent art production structure called D.A.E (*Donostiako Arte Ekinbideak*) in Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain. Between 2006 and 2009 she worked as chief curator at Sala Rekalde, Bilbao. She has contributed as a writer to numerous art and cultural magazines and catalogues. She is a PhD student in the Curatorial/Knowledge Programme in the Department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College and in the Department of Audiovisual Communication, University of the Basque Country.

Introduction

Jean-Paul Martinon

On the eve of 26 July 1866, in his flat at 89 Rue de Rome in Paris, the symbolist poet, English teacher, theatre and fashion critic Stéphane Mallarmé starts to jot down on paper plans for a series of 2-hour multi-sensory events that, he hopes, will constitute the final Orphic explanation of life on earth.¹

In his mind, the events will combine magic, a small parade, some ballet, a recital, the execution of an alchemical ritual, the calculation of a mathematical formula, the reading of sacred texts, some mime, the contemplation of a crystal chandelier and a carefully planned fireworks display. The events will take place on a giant site designed to resemble a stage, but which will also look like a chancel with an altar installed in the middle of a nineteenth-century salon with cozy fireplaces and some gas lamps. An ‘Operator’ (half-priest half-comedian) will orchestrate the shows from behind the scenes with the help of 24 ‘Assistants’.

Contrary to what one might think when the name of Mallarmé is mentioned (refined, carefully written abstract poetry), these events are very much conceived as an unscripted popular melodrama ‘without heroes’ to be performed by the general public itself (‘the Crowd’), a mass communal liturgy bringing all the arts together. Overall, Mallarmé’s aim is to expose ‘thought thinking itself’ and to synchronize poetry and art with the movement of the universe, and in the process allow the Absolute to expose and perform itself everywhere, once and for all. Not a small undertaking, but then again, Mallarmé envisions the project as a lifelong commitment, hoping to accomplish it before dying.

Twenty-two years later, on 21 November 1888, the project remains unfinished. Slightly disgruntled at the complexity of the undertaking, Mallarmé finally agrees to give his project a title: he will call his final Orphic event *This Is [C’est]*. Ten years later, Mallarmé dies leaving behind a half-scribbled note urging his family to burn all the documents relating to his masterpiece, unfinished despite

being 30 years in the making. The quasi-eschatological masterpiece never sees the light of day.

With some distance, Mallarmé's phantasmagorical plans can now, obviously, be seen as a typical example of an artist attempting, yet again, to come up with a 'Total Work of Art' in the same vein as Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* or Scriabine's *Mysterium*. However, it can also be understood in a different way: as the ultimate curatorial event. Indeed, how is one *not* to see, in this aborted project, an attempt to think 'the curatorial' a century or so before the very word began to acquire meaning? The whole gamut of issues facing curators today is all laid out in the few cryptic notes Mallarmé's family saved from the fire he mandated, which can perhaps be summarized in the following way (in no particular order):

- *This Is* displays the work of others (mimes, dancers, pyrotechnists, priests, etc.): it is *essentially expository*: it both shows and explains.
- *This Is* brings the past and the present together (old alchemy and the live contemplation of a chandelier, for example): it is *a multi-temporal event*.
- By bringing several arts and spaces together, *This Is* puts forward *a constellation of meaning* that no single art form could have generated.
- *This Is* has a message: *it actually says something*: *This Is* the final Orphic explanation of life on earth.
- *This Is* has no hero. The curator is a simple operator working behind the scenes. No artist predominates over the others. *It is seemingly egalitarian*.
- *This Is* reveals the way artifice (the arts) exposes nature (the universe). It is a planned victory of *techne* over *physis*: *a victory over entropy*.
- *This Is* brings human agency and the Absolute together. It is therefore not religious, but *secular and yet transcendental*.
- *This Is* does not pitch an object (artwork) against a subject (viewer), but is viewer-centered: the crowd makes it *experiential and participatory*.
- *This Is* resembles a manifestation and not an exhibition. It exposes, but does not exhibit; *it manifests a coming together of talents and artefacts*.
- *This Is* has no centre of significance: it takes place at once on a stage, salon and chancel, thus creating several centres of significance: *it is multi-sited*.
- *This Is* has no predetermined rules, grammar or syntax. *It needs to invent its own language* then and there as the events take place.
- *This Is* does not put forward a prescribed plot or pattern: instead, it offers the audience a 'deal', the opportunity to determine the event. *It is contingent, open to the unpredictable*.

- *This Is* is simultaneously performative (it performs the Absolute), constative (it is an explanation) and it has truth-value (it will succeed or not). As such, *This Is* exposes language as it exposes itself.
- *This Is* has no single point of view or perspective: the participants make the perspective. *It is formative, educational, and potentially political.*

This Is might perhaps resemble a failed attempt at a ‘Total Work of Art’, it might also be delusory and grandiose beyond reckoning, but it is also a contemporary curatorial project *before* its time: the author is dead, disciplines are blurred, it is performative, open-ended, synaesthetic, potentially politically transformative and above all, as Mallarmé’s notes with their endless numerical figures testify, regulated by financial concerns for its realization.

Invoking this odd, imagined project at the start of a collection of texts on contemporary curatorial practices is not intended to identify *This Is* as the clichéd point of origin or ultimate referent for the curatorial, but to highlight some of the issues that are at stake when addressing this multifaceted and controversial practice. I say ‘some’ because, as is well known, the curatorial can never be constricted. As one can already intimate by looking both at the long list drawn on the basis of Mallarmé’s imaginary project and at the contents of this book, the curatorial seeps and bleeds into many different fields and practices. Some complain that this is a problem. I would argue that, on the contrary, the protean guises of ‘the curatorial’ are precisely what give it its power and potential. It is also what makes it quintessentially of our time and, inevitably, a difficult thing to define.

So what is the book you are currently holding in your hands telling us about that protean practice, which old Mallarmé wrapped in his shawl, could never have imagined, let alone formulated on his own all these years ago?

The enclosed anthology of specifically commissioned texts provides an overview of a number of approaches to understand ‘the curatorial’. Again, I say a ‘number of approaches’ because its protean guises do not allow for the possibility of providing a comprehensive or exhaustive overview of the curatorial as such. The lengthy, but non-exhaustive bibliography provided at the end of this book clearly shows the many publications that have already attempted – with varying degrees of success – to do just that.

This book also does not contextualize the curatorial within a specific history (a totalizing and therefore hegemonic narrative of key events that tells us what art is and how it has been ‘best’ exhibited, for example) or framework (in relation to a ill-defined Zeitgeist abstraction such as ‘the contemporary’). Two recent

books, Terry Smith's *Thinking Contemporary Curating* and Paul O'Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, provide new and reinvigorating contextualizations (historical and otherwise) of what the word 'curatorial' means and their work cannot therefore be repeated here.

The following essays only attempt to think what the word 'curatorial' actually means without necessarily entrenching it within a particular discourse (art history, art criticism, etc.), discipline (anthropology, philosophy, etc.), field of knowledge (art practice, visual culture, etc.) or ideology (a social ideal, a set of beliefs, a political agenda, etc.). The aim of the following attempts is simply to reveal that the curatorial is an embattled term that cannot be singularized or totalized and that it is perfectly OK to live and work with such a warring term. Allow me to roughly summarize how this comes across (a summary that curiously echoes some of the remarks made about Mallarmé's fantasy project).

The curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure, a practice of creating allegiances against social ills, a way of caring for humanity, a process of renewing one's own subjectivity, a tactical move for reinventing life, a sensual practice of creating signification, a political tool outside of politics, a procedure to maintain a community together, a conspiracy against policies, the act of keeping a question alive, the energy of retaining a sense of fun, the device that helps to revisit history, the measures to create affects, the work of revealing ghosts, a plan to remain out-of-joint with time, an evolving method of keeping bodies and objects together, a sharing of understanding, an invitation for reflexivity, a choreographic mode of operation, a way of fighting against corporate culture, etc.

Although these answers vary greatly, six different themes can perhaps be discerned. These six themes structure the book in order to provide the reader not so much with an already fixed model of interpretation, but with a suggestive structure to articulate the various platforms from which one can depart when thinking the curatorial. These themes are as follows.

* * *

The Part I is called *Send-Offs* and is inspired by the way Jacques Derrida understands the metaphysical shift that has taken place in academia between the old disciplines of the humanities and the ones put forward today. These no longer posit a limitation to their fields of inquiry, but offer instead a new set of platforms from which to start thinking again. This can be understood both at the

level of ontology and that of the ontic 'sciences', including the fields of art history and curatorial activities. With this shift in mind, this first section puts forward the spirit of the whole book: to provoke shifts in thought in order to redistribute the parameters of what is understood by the curatorial. The aim of this first section is therefore to ensure that right at the start of this publication what is understood by the curatorial is put into question. In a way, this first section says: the curatorial is not necessarily what you think, so let's shift focus and think again: on your marks, get set, go! These send-offs take different shapes:

- In a poetic and evocative verbal acrobatics, Raqs Media Collective begin the proceedings with a thought-provoking allegorical text that offers a new cluster of tasks, expectations and possibilities to make sense of the curatorial today. Their aim is to expand the orbit and charge of the game in order to offer new ways of using the vocabulary of the curatorial. Self-declared 'jailbreakers', they call upon us to reach out to each other.
- I follow suit with a series of compact short theses that try to evaluate what goes on when the curatorial is understood together with thought. The aim of these short theses is to demonstrate that the curatorial is not necessarily tied to a history or a time (modern or contemporary art, for example), but a way of organizing thought in the encounter with the other and/or with objects (on display, for example).
- Alfredo Cramerotti asks us to abandon our androids, tablets and computers in order to rethink how the future comes. His reply is that it comes from the immemorial past that old stories (in newspapers) always seem to hold ready for us to discover. Once opened, the work then consists in curating for ourselves our own future. With Cramerotti, the curatorial becomes the way in which the future is articulated.
- In a personal and engaging text, Irit Rogoff gives us a stern reminder that our cherished infrastructures (museological, exhibitionary, academic, architectural, etc.) are effectively forms of containment and that we need to free ourselves from them by shifting knowledges, sensitivities and imaginaries. Rogoff's essay is a call to arms: not to destroy infrastructures, but to engage ourselves with our own contemporaneity in order to invent new points of departure.
- Finally, Natasa Ilić takes up the challenge to ask the brazen question: why do we still need art today? Ilić addresses this issue by contextualizing the way this question has been addressed over the years in the former Yugoslavian Republics and by reassessing the role of her curatorial collective

(WHW) in the past decade. In a bid to continue avoiding normalization, institutionalization and spectacularization, Ilić's frank answer is simply to wait, renew allegiances and ask the question again, all in order to set off afresh in a new direction.

* * *

Part II, *Praxeologies*, explores the intricate relationship between the body and exhibitions. As is well known, it is no longer possible to talk of self-contained subjectivities experiencing exhibitions in a disinterested manner. Our relationship to exhibitions is a complex and ambivalent event, in which what is exhibited is not necessarily the centre of attention. However, even if we know this, the question always comes back: how do our (artists', curators', viewers') bodies interact with what does not belong to our bodies? The four attempts to answer this question in this section all start from the premise that the representational model with which this relationship has traditionally been thought is no longer valid, that a new approach is necessary if we want to avoid the narcissism, autism and self-absorption that this old model implies. With this premise in tow, the following four authors take us on a journey using a treacherous path that knows neither respite nor end result. In doing so, they open up the possibility of new forms of practices (*praxis*) and language (*logos*).

- Stefan Nowotny takes us back to the mythological origin of the word 'curatorial' with Gaius Julius Hyginus's fable of Cura. His aim is not to emphasize once again that the origin of this concept relates to the activity of caring (for objects, for example), but to a moment of suspension or questioning in the middle of a whirlpool of uncertainties and dangerous currents. With this focus, Nowotny uncovers a new potential for curators, one which suddenly directs us right at the heart of what it means to be human.
- Drawing a distinction between the professional decision to become a curator and the ongoing act of becoming-curator, Suzana Milevska invigorates the way current curatorial strategies operate today. Her aim is to explore not only what it means to sustain the activity of curating, but also how it can be used productively to question hegemonic power structures and defend lesser-known art forms and cultural productions.
- Leire Vergara challenges us by considering the idea of exhausting as much as possible all institutional apparatus – including the white cube – not in order to propose a new model, but in order to reinvent new conditions of practices

and subjectivity. Vergara's essay draws a parallel between choreography and curating and in the process proposes to practise an 'exhausted curating'. This is not an invitation to take a break amidst the ruins of institutions, but to create new forms of engagement with reality.

- Finally, Jenny Doussan puts forward the idea that there can be a corporeal experience that is not dependent on spectacle and therefore on the instrumentality of language and its appendant institutional or exhibitionary apparatuses. In order to address this issue, Doussan puts forward three approaches: the self-renewing vitality of the body; the gratuitousness of collective embodied experiences and the embodied cognitive experience provided by the senses. Through these, Doussan strikes a serious blow to the autism that Agamben confined us to.

* * *

Part III is called *Moves*. This could give the impression that, once again, the focus will be on the fact that everything is transient, there are no subjects, no objects, no fixed knowledge, no finite bodies, no clear marks or demarcations and that we all live endless performances over constantly shifting grounds. Nothing is further away from this cliché than this section. *Moves* implies not simply fluctuation or unsteadiness, but a deliberate change of position or a calculated shift of settings. The overall aim of the following 'moves' is political in the sense that they attempt to distort, subvert, abuse, misuse what is generally taken for granted and is therefore hegemonic. The five authors in this section use all the available tools (real or imaginary) to do this. The end result is a reconfiguration and redistribution of words, events, tactics, names and language that any serious reading of the curatorial would and from now on *will* find difficult to ignore, to brush off, to which it can no longer turn a blind eye or a deaf ear.

- Ariella Azoulay begins the proceedings by providing us – in three languages – with the tools that have helped her curate the exhibition *Constituent Violence 1947–50*. At first, these tools appear as if they are only applicable to the context of Israel and Palestine: shifting the treacherous delineations and sedimentations that have structured a geopolitical situation in order to open up a different future. However, a careful reading of these tools reveals a greater potential for curators: a way of thinking the ethics of a curatorial politics in general.
- Sarah Pierce highlights the shifts that occur between curating and the curatorial. In doing so, her aim is to focus on this intangible moment

called ‘the beginning’: the point at which the curatorial sets off. Unlike curating, which structures itself by setting up or obeying real or imaginary limits (funding deadlines, openings, closings, etc.), the curatorial is, on the contrary, a simple operator that allows us to blur all these (dead)lines and limits thus challenging and (some times) attenuating their constraining powers.

- Doreen Mende proposes three short vignettes that allow us to see how a small displacement of meaning can potentially open up a new field of investigation in curatorial studies. She asks three pointed questions: is there not a blind spot between curating and the curatorial? Is there not, alongside what is exhibited, what is also inhibited? And finally, are exposures and interpretations not symptoms of a missing origin to the work of art? The use of words such as blind spot, inhibiting and symptom might at first seem unreasonable, but on reflection they soon reveal their true potential.
- Roopesh Sitharan confronts us by giving us a text written in both Malay and English. His aim is not perverse: an act of pedantic sophistry, for example. His aim is to deliberately expose how knowledge takes place: in shifts of language. These can be idiomatic (Malay-English in his case), but these can also be curatorial (subject-object, for example). These shifts show that knowledge cannot take place without blind spots or ‘vacuums’ as Sitharan says. The curatorial needs them for otherwise nothing (on the page or the exhibiting space) would ever take place.
- Finally, Joshua Simon, adopting the style of a public declaration at a political rally, brings this section back to Israel-Palestine. In doing so, he reveals for us the most paradigmatic and problematic shift imaginable: ‘betrayal’. With this word, his aim is not to propose a new tool. He does not want all of us to become betrayers or traitors. His aim is to highlight the driving force that exhibition displays can often produce. In doing so, he exposes how the curatorial operates politically: an operation that cares little for protocols of allegiance.

* * *

Part IV is entitled *Heresies*. At first, the word ‘heresies’ could be understood as a set of opinions profoundly at odds with what is generally accepted. If this were the case, then the following essays would simply be understood as performing a critique of received ideas about the curatorial and its place in the