

DUTY OF CARE

First published in 2012 by
ST PAUL St Publishing

Editor: Vera Mey
Copy editing: Kristen Wineera,
Melissa Laing, Charlotte Huddleston
Design: Neil May
Writers: Vera Mey, Wiebke Gronemeyer,
Kate BrettKelly-Chalmers, Alterations

The Curatorial Season 2012

23 February – 03 March
— Metaphoria: Tahi Moore, Daniel
Webby, Matt Henry, Alexandra
Savtchenko-Belskaia & Matthew George
Richard Ward.
Curated by Amelia Harris

15 – 17 March
— 2FOR1: Nicole Lim and David Sun

22 – 24 March
— Force Things: Eddie Clemens,
Michael Grobelny, Guy Nicoll, Scott
Rogers & Blaine Western.
Curated by Sonya Lacey & Vera Mey

29 – 31 March
— Oonst oonst Oonst OONST Ooonst:
Roman Mitch and Tahi Moore

12 – 20 April
— PAINTING THE AIR /
OPPORTUNIVORES / ARCHIVE FEVER /
MODULES FOR CONCEALMENT / AWRY
& ARRAY: Nayoungim & Gregory Mass,
Asumi Mizuo, Layla TC, Jayme Yen,
and Karen Zheng. Initiated by Narrow
Gauge

18 – 21 April
— The Bench or Hello for Dummies:
Ant Hampton and Glen Neath.
Curated by Alterations

26 – 28 April
— Stairway Cinema: Oh.No.Sumo

The ST PAUL St Gallery 2012
Curatorial Symposium

Ute Meta Bauer, Kate Rhodes, Wiebke
Gronemeyer, Heather Galbraith,
Caterina Riva, Ema Tavola, Jinsang
Yoo, Vera Mey, Charlotte Huddleston,
Anthony Byrt, Wystan Curnow, Dane
Mitchell & Kelvin Soh.

© 2012 ST PAUL St Gallery, AUT
University, the artists and authors

ISBN: 978-0-9864650-6-2

03

Vera Mey

**Stop asking us what exactly we do.
Or keep asking us what we do?**

09 Metaphoria

Tahi Moore, Daniel Webby, Matt Henry, Alexandra
Savtchenko-Belskaia and Matthew George Richard Ward.
Curated by Amelia Harris

12 2FOR1

Nicole Lim and David Sun

15 Force Things

Eddie Clemens, Michael Grobelny, Guy Nicoll, Scott Rogers and
Blaine Western. Curated by Sonya Lacey and Vera Mey

19 Oonst oonst Oonst OONST Ooonst

Roman Mitch and Tahi Moore

23 PAINTING THE AIR / OPPORTUNIVORES / ARCHIVE FEVER /
MODULES FOR CONCEALMENT / AWRY & ARRAY

Nayoungim & Gregory Mass, Asumi Mizuo, Layla TC, Jayme Yen, and
Karen Zheng. Initiated by Narrow Gauge

27 The Bench or Hello for Dummies

Ant Hampton and Glen Neath. Curated by Alterations

29 Stairway Cinema

Oh.No.Sumo

31

Wiebke Gronemeyer

The Conundrum Of Practice

40

Kate BrettKelly-Chalmers

**I never did believe in the ways of magic...
but I'm beginning to wonder why**

Being born into the wake of the Black Monday stock market crash, witnessing the desperate supermarket shoppers in the aftermath of the Asian Financial Crisis ten years later, and currently, albeit comically, seeing the world on the verge of Mayan calendar rapture, it is fascinating to observe the terms of crisis my generation find ourselves occupying. Every generation inherits its own set of crises in which our contexts and professions are inevitably enveloped. Currently within the curatorial we also see a set of issues emerge linked to some crisis point. Whether it be the role of contemporary art in the face of natural disaster (such as the 2010 Christchurch earthquake or more recent Hurricane Sandy in New York), criticism over genuine connection to place and community (to which independent jetset curators fall prey), or ownership, censorship and legitimation of creative expression and freedom (the recent museum responses around the 2011 arrest of Chinese artist and dissident Ai Weiwei come to mind), there are continual social and cultural parameters which frame the practices we work within and how this work is read and understood. Unlike our disempowered cousin art criticism, or the ageing discipline of art

history, the activity of contemporary curating is not necessarily on the verge of crisis.

Grappling with various texts, contemporary art related and otherwise, I have realised we always have been and always will be on the verge of change. It is over the past year and a half of my employment at ST PAUL St Gallery, a university gallery committed to the dissemination of the debate and presentation of contemporary art and design, that I have been inducted into ideas of the curatorial and had my aspirations in this field tested.

Recent literature on curating often grapples with the applied versus academic model of curating, a response to the proliferation of tertiary institutions providing training in this area. The methods by which we learn how to curate or even how we define what curating is are under continuous examination, something I experienced in my own curatorial training during an intensive programme attached to a biennale foundation as opposed to academic institution. The emergence of the amateur as expert as well as the blurring of disciplinary boundaries and the role of art bleeding into the social further calls into question the purposes, roles and responsibilities a curator

holds. This brings up questions around what directions and continents we look to when building discourse around curatorial practice in this locale, especially given the decentring of conventional cultural and economic global power we are currently witness to.

At an opening weekend talk hosted by the 9th Gwangju Biennale: *Roundtable 2012*, Boris Groys remarked that despite the disparate languages and geographies of the art on display, essentially they were all speaking the same language: the contemporary art lingua franca. His ideas in *Art Power* (2009) express that the artist has a gesture no other practitioner can mimic: the power to create an artwork and to elevate an object, no matter how labored or happenstance, to the status of art. The curator, on the other hand does not hold this same power of gesture; rather “the curator can’t but place, contextualize, and narrativise works of art – which necessarily leads to their relativisation.”¹ Despite the multiple methods and processes adopted to develop exhibitions – undoubtedly a key task of the curator – each end result has a relative similarity in the language it conveys. No matter where or how an exhibition is staged there are

certain conventions a curator must adhere to in order to curate an exhibition, despite what it contains. These conventions of an exhibition generally involve a relationship between artists, artwork and space. A contemporary art exhibition tends to look like one whether it is presenting a static artwork or artwork in the making. If we, as curators, are not making art but doing something else then perhaps it is worthwhile considering the economy and terms of our production. This is the language we are grappling with: the concern of mediating or even translating this lingua franca is the responsibility of the curator.

The exhibition of contemporary art is a language of codes that is at once global but also a subculture in its own right, esoteric to any outsider. The curator is a manipulator of time through the gallery where past, present and future rhythms evaporate through the process of juxtaposition and selection of artwork from disparate locations and histories. This process is inherently a spatial practice through means of selection and arrangement of objects, people and artworks. If “contemporary art is the institutionalised network through which the art of today presents itself to itself and its interested audiences”,² then we

must consider how the role of the curatorial is positioned within this and what we are implicit in when we practice with so many parties at stake.

The curator has a responsibility to safeguard the artist and their artwork in the context of an exhibition, but what happens when this goes awry and the public do not necessarily recognise a separation between a curatorial gesture and the artistic one?

My most trying experience over the past year thinking, consuming and doing curating involved the selection of a video artwork by Sophia Al-Maria, *For your eyes only* (2007) showing women getting ready to go to a wedding. A proviso of the work involved the film being exclusive to the female gaze thus excluding men. This requirement was an inherent aspect of the work and a conceptual gesture conceived by the artist. Despite careful curatorial framing the wrong reading was extrapolated from the work and made front page news of *The Dominion Post* hinting at systemic racism. The host museum was eventually called to mediation by the Human Rights Commission to meet with complainants on the grounds of gender discrimination. Within this situation we see the role of

the curator seep beyond the museum and an art context to encounter the social realm sometimes colloquially referred to as ‘the real world’. Within this example curating became an amorphous practice, going beyond the conventional role of selecting artworks to converse within a space and enter into a dialogue with cultural contexts, locales and the relationship with a public beyond the museum’s walls.

For a practice whose boundaries are blurred between the social, cultural or artistic realms how do we determine our responsibilities, ethics and duty of care? If there is an appropriate code of conduct then can this be solely intuitive or should it be institutionally determined?

Despite the diverging contexts and methods in which exhibitions exist and even in the most unlikely places, our economy is the same – a relationship between people, art, structures and contexts. Our economy is not limited to but predominantly activated through conversation. This conversation may take form through various artworks within a space, between people, or between an institution and its public. The curator exists because of this necessary relationship between the artist, artwork, exhibition, public and

the entanglement of all these parties. The negotiation of these multiple and complex relationships can make curating an immaterial but relational practice, one which is contingent on speaking the language of the exhibition. A recent research trip to China reminded me of the fluidity of the terms “museum” and “curator” and the renegade attitude in which they were attached to anything from an artist being provided an opportunity to manage an exhibition project to a converted power plant refitted to house large artworks.

Over the period between February and April 2012, ST PAUL St Gallery commissioned a series of week long exhibitions dedicated to the work of curating, effectively handing over our Gallery Three project space to various curators. The ambition of the ST PAUL St Gallery 2012 Curatorial Season was to show the diversity of practices from emerging curators here in Auckland. Alongside the exhibition we also convened the first ST PAUL St Gallery 2012 Curatorial Symposium as an attempt to stimulate formalised discussion on the state of curating as it currently sits locally with an eye to international comparison. Part of the impetus behind the attention to local methods of curating is to demand our

attention and reorientation to the particularities of exhibition making here.

Within this publication Kate Brett Kelly-Chalmers, an Auckland based curator and art historian provides an account of being an audience member of the 2012 Curatorial Symposium noticing the inevitable link between curating and geography. Wiebke Gronemeyer's essay, derived from the paper she delivered at the 2012 Curatorial Symposium looks at the implications of curating and the curatorial being enveloped into the social realm. It considers the structures in which these practices are framed, citing Anton Vidokle's *unitednationsplaza* (2006 - 2007) as a model which swallows the curatorial and discursive gesture within an artist's practice. This artist/curator overlap was also addressed during Roman Mitch's contribution to the season alongside the other projects, which included: curating as a physical structure (architectural collective oh.no.sumo); curating as a strategy for diversity (Nicole Lim, Fresh Gallery Otara); curator as editor (through the medium of publication (Narrow Gauge and collaborators); curating as a collective agency (Alterations); curating as a metaphor (Amelia Harris); and curating engaging

with design practices (Sonya Lacey and Vera Mey). These are only a slice of some of the ways in which people are addressing this notion of the curatorial through both institutional and independent means. Part of the strategy of employing multiple perspectives and practitioners within this Curatorial Season was a safety in numbers generational approach to preserve the diversity of voices operating instead of reducing it down to a single set of ideas. This publication exists as way for some of these ideas from the Season and Symposium to live on.

Although I started this introduction off with crisis, when we, ST PAUL St Gallery, first decided to embark on a series of exhibitions and symposia dedicated to curating, we noticed an abundance of publication, conversation and discursive models all aimed at adding to the activity known as curatorial practice. When researching the state of discussion on this activity in New Zealand, however, there was a relative lack of documentation available. Anecdotes were abundant but critical examination on the formation of local curatorial practice was only found by word of mouth rather than ample record or dedicated publications. The situation is similar in the wider Asia Pacific region

where archives for seminal exhibition making are found not only in the grand tomes of national institutions but also through more vernacular histories developed by short lived artist initiatives or spontaneous encounters between particular people. The discourse of curating in New Zealand still feels like an unrecorded oral history in which we're trying to connect these parts together. So please, if conversation within curating is our economy then let's keep talking.

(1) Groys, Boris. *Art Power*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008. 45.

(2) Smith, Terry. *What is Contemporary Art?*, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2009. 241.

—
— When Emperor Penguins settle into winter, the male stays with the egg, enduring the extreme weather while balancing the egg on his feet, waiting for the chick to hatch. The female swims her long journey to the open ocean to gather food. Neither the winter, or the female's journey appear to take longer than is necessary. The egg hatches, the father waits with the newborn chick, and eventually the mother returns.

23 —
03

March
February 2012

METAPHORIA

Tahi Moore, Daniel Webby, Matt Henry, Alexandra
Savtchenko-Belskaia & Matthew George Richard Ward
Curated by Amelia Harris

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



METAPHORIA



ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



METAPHORIA

—

— 2 FOR 1 is an exhibition featuring 2 emerging Asian artists, Nicole Lim and David Sun, who share and belong to the same generation group labelled as the 1.5 generation (or 1.5G). The 1.5 generation is an international term used by immigration departments to refer to those who have migrated to a new country at a young age. Nicole Lim has worked with David Sun to produce an exhibition to draw upon their experiences of living in diasporas. These artists not only confront issues of cultural dislocation, memories, migration and acceptance of being a 1.5er, but they also celebrate the combined benefits of both their native homeland and their new adopted country.

15 —
17March
2012

2FOR1

Nicole Lim & David Sun



ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



2FOR1

However materially stable objects may seem, they are, let us say, different things in different scenes

— Marcel Mauss

im just not getting these force things...

— HobieDude16

So we started with things. We are interested in this idea of getting to an object, how it can be understood or apprehended, how it can be got. Perhaps a good place to start is simply to consider the way by which objects get to us. Something we noticed about the work in the show – about how the artists got to the objects – were the relationships at play during the process of design and manufacture. Many of these works have a catalogue of technicality involved in their making, processes which often depend on specialist knowledge, such as programming, software applications, structures or fabrication. These collaborative methodologies are analogous to processes and production in design-related industries.

These industries get to objects via prototyping and by sending out propositions that should work in

the physical world. A prototype is a theoretical object – not a real thing but an object-before-the-object, a dress rehearsal. It is made for scrutiny, for us to watch an idea perform in a physical environment outside of the ideal space of the page or computer. We are thinking about the prototype occupying a position somewhere between the hypothesis for the thing and its disappearance. We're thinking about the influence of these force things in bringing the object into existence. The prototype is not simply the stress-test of an idea it is also a thing at its most visible. Once an object passes this test – that's when it disappears into use and social context.

22 —
24

March
2012

FORCE THINGS

Eddie Clemens, Michael Grobelny, Guy Nicoll,
Scott Rogers & Blaine Western
Curated by Sonya Lacey & Vera Mey

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



FORCE THINGS

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



FORCE THINGS

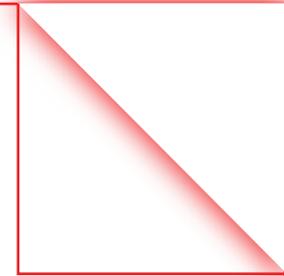
ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



FORCE THINGS

29 —
31

March
2012



The drums in electronic music can teach you a lot
It's not at all about trying to sound like drums, but about the sequence
That creates the effect

If you live in the outer suburbs of Auckland there is only one way to get in to the city
And as a teenager in the 1990s the cars were all suped-up
My first car-owning friend was also a techno guy with 15" subs in the back
It was an embarrassment, so you just had to go with it

the subs were angled in toward one another
I'm quite sure this cancelled out the effect
which was a good thing

People always complain that bass-cars don't sound any good from the outside
But it's exactly the opposite, they're horrible things to be in
And the sound is superb for a pedestrian

Oonst
oonst
Oonst
OOONST
Ooonst

Roman Mitch & Tahi Moore

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



OOONST OOONST OOONST OOONST

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



OOONST OOONST OOONST OOONST

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



OOONST OONST OONST OONST OONST

12 —
20April
2012

Dear Nayoungim, Gregory, Karen, and Asumi —

We invite you to collaborate with us.

We'd like to create an exhibition in which a publication document becomes an integral component of the outcome. We're interested in collapsing the entire creative process: the planning of the exhibition, the planning of the document, the exhibition, as well as the exchange of ideas and material between all participants.

The possibility for multiple representations of the artists being simultaneously present in the same space is another element of this framework that interests us.

Distance will be a necessary object and obstacle. The exhibition will be in Auckland. Layla, Karen, and Asumi are local. Jayme is in Seattle. Gregory and Nayoungim are in Seoul.

Let us know what you think, we'd be thrilled to have you as part of this project.

Layla and Jayme

PAINTING THE AIR / OPPORTUNIVORES / ARCHIVE FEVER / MODULES FOR CONCEALMENT / AWRY & ARRAY,

Nayoungim & Gregory Mass, Asumi Mizuo, Layla TC,
Jayme Yen & Karen Zheng. Initiated by Narrow Gauge.

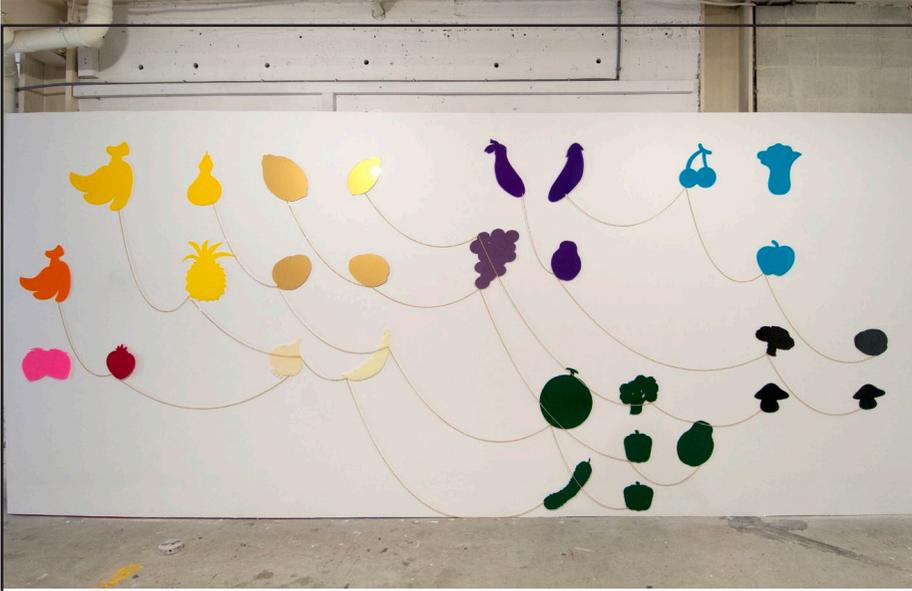
ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



PAINTING THE AIR / OPPORTUNIVORES / ARCHIVE FEVER /
MODULES FOR CONCEALMENT / AWRY & ARRAY,



PAINTING THE AIR / OPPORTUNIVORES / ARCHIVE FEVER /
MODULES FOR CONCEALMENT / AWRY & ARRAY,



—

— You are warmly invited to attend the play *The Bench or Hello for Dummies* by Ant Hampton and Glen Neath. Curated by Alterations with support from ST PAUL St Gallery and Auckland Council.

The Bench or Hello for Dummies is an intimate and lasting encounter that reflects on the experience of meeting strangers. In signing up for this play you will be guided to a specific park bench in central Auckland and paired up with a stranger.

18 —
21

April
2012

The Bench or Hello for Dummies

Ant Hampton & Glen Neath
Curated by Alterations

Remembering the conversation we had on the bench
Alterations

This is the last time we will meet.

Why did you look away so soon?

I have nothing more to say. I walk away turning back momentarily.

No goodbye.

Confetti decorates the sky. The fallen pieces on the pavement show fragments of a map on one side.

When you stood up I thought this is it, this is when all is revealed.

This is it. This is when all will be revealed.

You shouldn't have torn that piece of paper.

I tear the map into small pieces and hold it in my fist. The paper is moist from my hand.

I don't understand what he means by all this gesturing. Is this a cue for the final act?

I've stopped listening to her and my attention is on other strangers walking past. It's rush hour. This play is happening unnoticed.

A flock of skateboarders have just descended on the concrete steps making it difficult for me to now hear his repeated lines and the instructions given to me.

I draw a frame in the air for the next scene. He points inside it to where we could be. There has been no interruption from a mobile phone.

I wonder how I should perform for you? I can't act beyond these lines of introduction.

I introduce myself several times as different characters. I don't believe he is who he says he is.

In my peripheral vision I see she is wearing plain clothes and flat shoes. No jewellery. I feel I have met her before. I think she is a friend of a friend.

There is concrete everywhere. The few trees that are in this courtyard have been braced with metal. Birds cry as the sun sets on skyscrapers. A streetlight spots us sitting on a bench with an incandescent glow. It could almost be time to rain.

The play begins as a series of hellos. The dialogue is a snappy back and forward exchange. The structure of a conversation becomes apparent. Sometimes I am a little slow and wonder if that is why my partner comes in so quickly after me.

Looking sharply forward, the bench is in sight. A replica of the image printed on the map held in front of me. Once we reach the bench we both turn as directed and sit down in unison. Our elbows touch unknowingly.

We walk together towards the bench. I avoid my partner's face as instructed. I don't want to break the illusion. It is only the first act after all. I'm open to what will happen.

We are joined up side by side. He is also wearing an outer layer, looking nondescript. Another, who stands before us, syncs up our iPods and runs through the procedure. They are implicated in voicing the script, and although seemingly practiced, appear just as vulnerable at reading the situation.

A stranger outside the library receives me with an iPod and earphones. I'm the first to arrive. I wear the earphones and wait for my next cue. Will this play be a comedy or a tragedy?

There is an autumnal chill to the air and the city sky is twilight blue. Although I have already spotted the guide who I was told to meet – lingering street corner on the look out – I go back to the office to collect a jacket. On my return I am shown a piece of printed paper – it's a map. It is held up to shield my face, as the guide and I walk towards two figures in the distance with their backs to us. It all begins from here.

Hello.

—
— For their project as part of the ST PAUL St Gallery 2012 Curatorial Season experimental design collective Oh.No. Sumo have made Stairway Cinema. This architectural feature aims to expand the gallery's programmes literally into the public realm of the street. Engaging with passersby, Stairway Cinema will create free public entertainment and social space that is drawn from the existing properties of the gallery building.

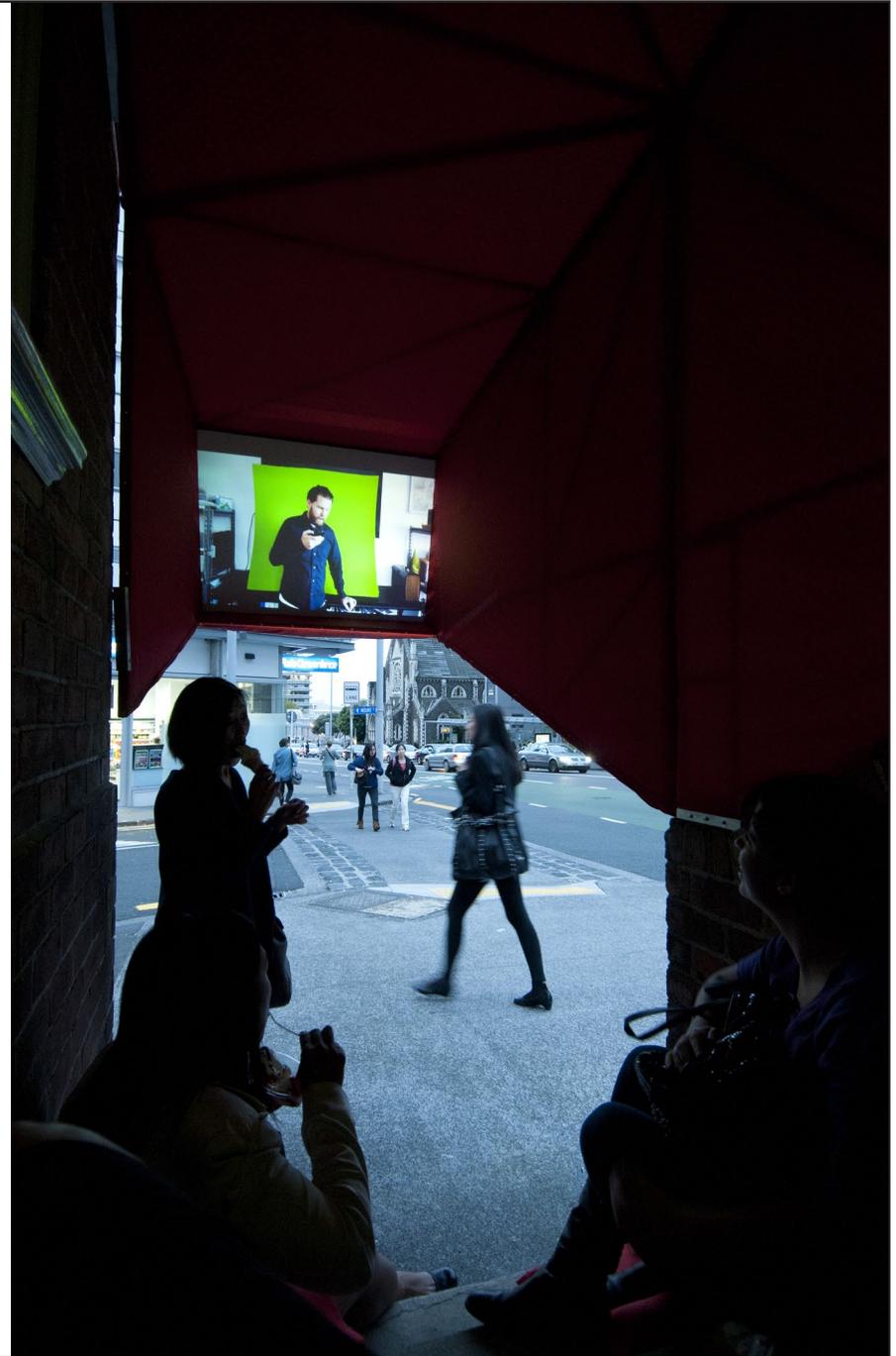
26 —
28

April
2012

STAIRWAY CINEMA

Oh.No.Sumo (Patrick Loo, Sarosh Mulla, James Pearce & Kathy O'Shaughnessy)

ST PAUL ST CURATORIAL SEASON 2012



STAIRWAY CINEMA

1

Anton Vidokle. "Art Without Artists?" e-flux journal 16 (May 2010). 8 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-without-artists/>>.

2

Rus Bojan, Maria, Beatrice von Bismarck et al. "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?" e-flux journal 18 (September 2010). 8 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/letters-to-the-editors-eleven-responses-to-anton-vidokle's-art-without-artists/>>.

3

Rogoff, Irit. "Smuggling: A Curatorial Model." Under Construction: Perspectives on Institutional Practice. Eds. Vanessa Joan Müller, and Nicolas Schaffhausen. Köln: Walther König, 2006. 132- 36.

4

Hoffmann, Jens. "Overture." The Exhibitionist 1 (January 2012). 2-5.

5

Sheikh, Simon. "Constitutive Effects: The Techniques of the Curator." Curating Subjects. Ed. Paul O'Neill. London: Open Editions, 2007. 147-185.

6

For example, recent publications look into the practice of curating as a form of contemporary historiography that debates the role of contemporary art as a global force of cultural production (Smith, Terry. "Thinking Contemporary Curating", New York: Independent Curators International, 2012; O'Neill, Paul. "The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)", Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012.)

Curating has long been caught up in a series of binary oppositions that serve to define as well as to dispute the realm of its practice. The most prominent of these include the 'artist/curator' debate with its recent public outburst on e-flux in 2010, occasioned by the polemic proclamation of "Art Without Artists?" by Anton Vidokle.¹ This was followed by eleven responses from various artists and curators.² Another highly visible discussion takes place around the terminological differentiation of 'curating' versus 'curatorial' as first outlined by Irit Rogoff in 2006.³ The theoretical discussion of curating is also marked by a continuous debate around the medium of the exhibition as the primary medium of curating practice⁴ where the "techniques of the curator," to quote Simon Sheikh⁵ are most effectively at play. These are only a few examples of contested grounds of discussion in which the continuous differentiation of the practice of curating is located while being contextualised in a variety of disciplines.⁶ From art historians to theorists and philosophers, from institutional and independent curators to artists, many different stakeholders in the contemporary art world discuss the practice of curating, its condition, constitution, role, and function in the larger frameworks of cultural production.

With regards to particular examples, the oppositions outlined above might be at the forefront of the curating discourse, however when taking into account a more general discussion on creative practices, a whole other set of concerns come into sight. Of particular interest in this essay is the question of whether the practices of art, curating, or writing produce knowledge, and if so, whom this knowledge serves? Questions surrounding the production of knowledge should be considered in light of the research and writing around the continuous dematerialisation of labour and the generation and accumulation of intellectual capital.

Pointing to these different levels of discourse requires a shift in the ways in which we treat the binary oppositions that frame curating. In the following therefore I map out a conundrum of practice for curating looking at its role and function within the larger sphere of cultural production. This essay should be read as trying to integrate a more general perspective back into the debates on the role of the curator, the sphere of practice, and the medium in which its implicit conditions are negotiated. This is not to generalise the task of defining curating or entirely shift the discussion to the grounds of cultural analysis, but to gain a more complex perspective on what the shift of agency from the artist to the curator and (vice versa), or the distinction between curating and the curatorial involves. This entails, first and foremost, the assumption of a perspective that manifests a shift from position to interest, which means to leave any distinction between roles such as artist or curator behind, and focus rather on what intentions, aims and responsibilities the practice of curating involves.

To give an example, in 2006 Anton Vidokle, founder of e-flux, initiated, amongst others,⁷ *unitednationsplaza*, an independent event-based programme of talks, lectures, workshops, and screenings in a former supermarket office in Berlin's Platz der Vereinten Nationen (United Nations Plaza). Following the cancellation of Manifesta 6, for which he acted as a co-curator, Vidokle was interested in maintaining and realising the idea of a temporal experimental school in which he involved around 100 artists, writers, curators, and theorists. The attendees gave presentations, hosted discussions or just had a few drinks at the bar with at times larger and at other times smaller audiences, mostly international artists or art-affiliates living in Berlin. What prevented the school from becoming the hot spot of Berlin's art scene at the time

7

unitednationsplaza is a project by Anton Vidokle in collaboration with Boris Groys, Jalal Toufic, Liam Gillick, Martha Rosler, Natascha Sadr Haghhighian, Nikolaus Hirsch, Tirdad Zolghadr and Walid Raad. The online archive with detailed descriptions of all events, including Night School, can be found at <http://www.unitednationsplaza.org>.

8

Hadley+Maxwell. "Find Us At The Kitchen Door." *Art Lies* 59 (Fall 2008). 12 Nov. 2011 <<http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1661&issue=59&s=1>>; Fazeli, Taraneh. "Class Consciousness." *Artforum* Summer 2009 (2010): 129-32; Essays by Media Farzin, Maria Lind, Liam Gillick, Monika Szewczyk and Jan Verwoert published in a collection of essays on Vidokle's practice (Brian Sholis, ed. Anton Vidokle - *Produce, Distribute, Discuss, Repeat*. New York: Sternberg Press, 2009.)

was probably the one unspoken condition to participate: coming to *unitednationsplaza* meant to become very much involved in the discussions and commit to the often extremely time-consuming sessions. It was not a space where one could drop in and out or make it a stop on a usual gallery-opening-night-tour. If you stuck around, by the end of the year it felt like you had become a member of some kind of social club for art intellectuals. Following the conclusion of the project in Berlin, and a shorter one-month version in Mexico City, Eungie Joo, curator of Education at New York's New Museum, commissioned the project as an artwork by Vidokle. In 2009 Night School was launched at the New Museum, a year-long series of discussions that would be held for four days every month. While mostly the same speakers and presenters who were involved in Berlin also took centre stage in New York, the audience was comprised of museum visitors, who could attend the sessions with their museum ticket, and also included a 'core group' of some 20 people previously chosen by Vidokle, Joo and Liam Gillick.

This project could be seen in many different lights, and it has been much discussed in many thoughtful essays and articles, often by the participants or speakers involved.⁸ But the reason I chose to focus on these three individual, yet closely related projects is because they serve to illustrate the complexities and challenges that the practice of curating faces when it is looked at with the question in mind: what function does curating assume within the larger sphere of cultural production?

Looking for the location, manifestation and deployment of responsibility in the practice of curating with regards to the larger sphere of cultural production means to inherently discuss questions of agency, contextualisation and mediation. Doing so lays emphasis on the question of what differences in authorship,

autonomy and responsibility are brought forth by varying articulations of the relation between people and things, articulations which curating, as a practice of organising and deliberating social space, makes explicit. In the case of Vidokle, it is the different articulations of his own role that are of specific interest: (1) there is the role of the curator in which he acted for Manifesta 6; (2) there is the artist that conceives of *unitednationsplaza* independently from institutional affiliations even his own project *e-flux*,⁹ (3) there is the artist who produces an artwork, *Night School*, for the New Museum that commissioned it. However, defining the differences in authorship, autonomy and responsibility that these particular roles entail will not allow us to draw clear boundaries between the role of the curator and the artist. Instead it gives us an idea on what kind of relationship curating has to the larger field of cultural production, and how that relationship is formed.

IN THE MAKING

Firstly, however, it is necessary to look closer at the specific debates that dominate the discourse around the practice of curating, with the intention of considering it within the larger scope of the sphere of cultural production. Primarily I will be working with Irit Rogoff's distinction between 'curating' and the 'curatorial',¹⁰ although I do not intend to follow her argument that dismisses curating in favour of the curatorial. Rogoff defines curating as "the practice of putting on exhibitions and the various professional expertise it involves" in contrast to the curatorial as "the possibility of framing those activities through series of principles and possibilities."¹¹ The reason to differentiate these

9

In economic terms, one could call *unitednationsplaza* a daughter of *e-flux*. It serves as one of the projects that *e-flux*, which started as an art world news digest in 1999, runs independently or in collaboration with institutions since 2001.

10

Rogoff, Irit. "Smuggling: A Curatorial Model." *Under Construction: Perspectives on Institutional Practice*. Eds. Vanessa Joan Müller, and Nicolas Schaffhausen. Köln: Walther König, 2006. 132- 36.

11

Ibid, 132.

12

Ibid, 132.

13

Ibid, 133.

14

Andreasen, Søren, and Lars Bang Larsen. "The Middlemen: Beginning to Talk About Mediation." *Curating Subjects*. Ed. Paul O'Neill. London: Open Editions, 2007. 23.

15

Rus Bojan, Maria, Beatrice von Bismarck et al. "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?" *e-flux journal* 18 (September 2010). 8 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/letters-to-the-editors-eleven-responses-to-anton-vidokle's-art-without-artists/>>.

terms is because those principles in the realm of the curatorial might not, unlike curating, be associated with "displaying works of art", but rather "begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage," by which she means principles of knowledge production, of activism, of cultural translations or circulations.¹² Behind this distinction lies an understanding of curating as a form of 'intention', 'illustration' and 'exemplification' and the term curatorial as reflecting the desire to emphasise the element of observation, reflection and critique that is part of the work of a curator, but often not discernible in the final product of the exhibition. Therefore, for Rogoff, the curatorial "points in some direction we might not have been able to predict."¹³

Since Rogoff wrote this text in 2006 we have come to see a proliferation of this kind of curatorial practice associated with forms of knowledge production and cultural translation, one that predominantly operates in the discursive sphere and is no longer focussed solely on the display of artworks. As this enhances the curator's level of agency, their responsibility changes. Making claims for knowledge production requires a much more articulated and specific positioning than that of the mediator, who is "a supplementary subjectivity or a subject who is out of place."¹⁴ Instead, as Beatrice von Bismarck proclaims: "the 'curatorial' allows itself to assume, mirror, and expose the existing relations to public address, economy, and subjectivization in the artistic field" and it is through this "that it may visualize potential modifications, alternatives, and changes, and ultimately gain its aesthetic as well as political relevance."¹⁵

The debate on the distinction between curating and the curatorial has shifted to a level on which the question is no longer which medium or material the curator works with, but which mode of predominant

agency and responsibility the curator assumes in the public sphere. On this level, the curator is perceived as rivalling the artist on the contested ground of who has the definitive capacity “to designate something as art or like art.”¹⁶ This is what Boris Groys calls the politics of installation, which deals with the question of the difference between the installation, the artwork, the forms of agency that are negotiated in an exhibition space, and that which is outside of it. The exhibition, here, is of course only one exemplary medium of practice, as much for the curator as well as for the artist.¹⁷ Groys denies the curator, acting in the name of the public, the responsibility of instigating and affirming the process of knowledge production in the exhibition space. Rather, he affirms the artist, who imposes their sovereign will upon the space, as the author of an installation. By arguing that the material from which the installation is conceived is already part of or originating in the social sphere, Groys demonstrates that the curator or institution’s role in establishing a relationship to the social sphere is being made redundant by the artist.¹⁸ As much as this argument could be read in the vein of Vidokle, who venerates the sovereignty of the artist, Groys’ proposition is more complex. The politics of installation does not express a concern with whether it is art that is produced. Instead, looking at the politics of installation creates a framework to understand the methodology of curation as a process which “installs everything that usually circulates in our civilisation: objects, texts, films, etc.” Thereby the installation is in direct relation to the social sphere. In this understanding “what becomes crucial is the distinction between a marked, installation space and unmarked, public space.”¹⁹ This function of the installation is one that applies as much to how curators work with space as to artistic practice, because it is a strategy of display, a methodology of determination

16

Anton Vidokle. “Art Without Artists?” *e-flux Journal* 16 (May 2010). 8 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/art-without-artists/>>.

17

Groys, Boris. “Politics of Installation.” *Boris Groys. Going Public*. Eds. Brian Kuan Wood, Julieta Aranda, and Anton Vidokle. New York: Sternberg, 2010. 50-69.

18

Ibid., 58.

19

Ibid., 55.

20

Gillick, Liam. “Maybe it Would be Better if We Worked in Groups of Three? Part 1 of 2: The Discursive.” *e-flux Journal* 3 (February 2009). 5 May 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-1-of-2-the-discursive/>>.

21

Rosler, Martha, and Anton Vidokle. “Exhibition as School as Work of Art.” *Art Lies* 59 (Fall 2008). 12 Nov. 2011 <<http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1661&issue=59&s=1>>.

22

Vidokle, Anton. “From Exhibition to School: Notes From Unitednationsplaza.” *Art School (Propositions for the 21st Century)*. Ed. Steven Henry Madoff. Cambridge, MA, London: MIT Press, 2009. 192.

incorporating the possibility of its own disruption.

From this perspective, it is no longer relevant to embark on a discussion of what difference it makes that Vidokle acts at one time as a curator, and at another time as an artist. Instead, what matters is to think about what model of practice is used to mark the space of the installation in distinctio to unmarked public space. Therefore Vidokle uses a discursive model of practice, described by Liam Gillick as what “offers one the opportunity to be a relatively unexamined, free agent within a collective project.”²⁰ It is in this sense that Vidokle describes unitednationsplaza as having a “transformative function,”²¹ installing a marked space within an unmarked public space that serves to draw attention to the very conditions of what it means to operate in relation to the public sphere. Vidokle’s interest, aside from the position from which he speaks, is to “engage with society in order to create certain freedoms, to produce the conditions necessary for creative activity to take place at all.”²²

MARKING SPACE - THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURE

While one can look at Vidokle’s projects as an example of practice that applies a discursive model in order to negotiate its own relation to its immediate cultural, social, and political context, it remains unclear how such a role can be described. By introducing the notion of the cultural producer, a new perspective in the debate on the role of the curator in relation to that of the artist or the institution may be gained. It also enables one to ask more precisely what “creating certain freedoms” might mean.

The term ‘cultural producer’ designates the

very same process of marking space and negotiating materialities for processes of knowledge production that occur in the politics of installations. It received more positive attention in the 1990's, while in recent years it has been viewed more critically. Curators Jens Hoffmann and Nato Thompson understand the term 'culture producer' as successfully contributing to a blurring of the boundaries between the roles of the artist and the curator on the level of activism. For Hoffmann this is a result of the 1990's "expansion of the concept of art, and of the politicisation of the art scene. [...] This development stands in close connection with the lived reality of many of the persons concerned. They write texts, work at night as DJs, are active in political groups, and have a job in the media. The title of culture producer can subsume all of these different areas of activity."²³ Thompson describes this "world of cultural production as an economy through which we all must navigate" in an activist manner: "ultimately, my hope is that we are attempting to make meaning in the world that allows a critical perspective on power as well as producing alternative, desirous forms of resistant subjectivity."²⁴ But the term cultural production also introduces a problem that must be recognised. The origins of the term "in an emerging neoliberal paradigm of social production" emphasise the need to revise the use of this terminology.²⁵ For Thompson this is as much a concern for the curator as for the artist, "for, certainly, in an information age in which the production of culture is one part of a massive service sector, we find the nitpicking between artists and curators to be just a petty squabble in a much larger neoliberal market of precarity."²⁶

However, for the curator as cultural producer for whom the activity of curating and the sphere of the curatorial are combined precisely because cultural producers operates not only in the space of the exhibition

23

Hoffmann, Jens. "God is a Curator." *Mib - Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice*. Eds. Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler, and Künstlerhaus Bethanien. Frankfurt am Main: Revolver, 2004. 108.

24

Thompson, Nato, and Michelle White. "Curator as Producer." 2008. *Art Lies* 59 (Fall 2008). 18. March 2012 <<http://www.artlies.org/article.php?id=1659&issue=59&s=0>>.

25

Ibid.

26

Rus Bojan, Maria, Beatrice von Bismarck et al. "Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle's "Art Without Artists?" *e-flux journal* 18 (September 2010). 8 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/letters-to-the-editors-eleven-responses-to-anton-vidokle-s-art-without-artists/>>.

27

Groys, Boris. "Politics of Installation." *Boris Groys. Going Public*. Eds. Brian Kuan Wood, Julieta Arana, and Anton Vidokle. New York: Sternberg, 2010. 53.

28

Duman, Alberto. "When Travesty Becomes Form." *Mute* 2.9, July 2008 (2008): 95-98.

29

Ibid, 98-101.

30

Gillick, Liam. "Maybe it Would be Better if We Worked in Groups of Three? Part 1 of 2: The Discursive." *e-flux journal* 3 (February 2009). 5 May 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/maybe-it-would-be-better-if-we-worked-in-groups-of-three-part-1-of-2-the-discursive/>>.

but in the larger sphere of knowledge production or cultural translation, the claim for sovereignty in Groys' politics of installation is not about freedom, as it is for the artist, but about expertise as a form of legitimation.²⁷ Artist Alberto Duman criticises this problematic when he suggests that those using the term cultural producer in order to avoid the specifications of the artist or the curator and their recurring commodifications are "in resemblance to the main problematic of its subject," namely "making self-reflexivity a creed and the dilemma of how to articulate critical intervention within the institution a matter of endless discursive folds."²⁸ By 'institution' Duman is not only referring to the non-profit institution of the museum, but to the institutionalisation of critical discourse on the roles of the artist and curator and the distinction between curating/curatorial that has seen them reconceived as a form of culture production. Instead of producing a set of interesting paradigms for the practice of curating, the kind of self-critical curatorial discourse that has been produced to date around the notion of the curator as cultural producer only further defines the curator as a "footloose agent of creation and dissemination of knowledge, stretching across previously unestablished axes or exploiting existing ones in the name of a progressive redistribution of governance, and counter-hegemonic positioning". This produces an institutionalisation of a pseudo-critical form of curating where "ambiguity is the norm and travesty becomes form" leaving "little room for antagonism, or the concrete refashioning of relationships across the systems in which we operate."²⁹

This critique can also be applied to the discursive model of practice. According to Gillick, the discursive is a "model of production in its own right, alongside the production of objects for consideration or exchange."³⁰ It takes the form of statements,

conversations, discussions and debates, in speaking as well as in writing, and “is the basis of art that involves the dissemination of information.”³¹ Thereby, it can assume the shape of an infrastructure (a seminar, a workshop, a publication), as much as a medium (spoken or written word). With this double function in mind “the discursive is what produces the work, and in the form of critical and impromptu exchanges, it is also its desired result.”³² In analogy to the nature of the discursive as founded upon the dissemination of information—as opposed to the studio or exhibition space where objects are produced for consideration—it is the element of speculation that opens up spheres of experimentation and risk. The speculative character of the discursive model of practice is what enables it to provide a ‘real’ zone of production, creating an immediate reality, which is not a form of intervention into a context, but a strategy of paralleling, mirroring and mimicking existing structures, particularly those of the post-Fordist economy. While Gillick finds therein the “political potential of the discursive,”³³ the displacement that the discursive performs in terms of a re-occupation of public space, is not directed towards the systems in which we operate, like that of the post-Fordist economy, but mimics it. In the case of *unitednationsplaza*, Vidokle while acting seemingly independently from a larger institutional framework, creates his own institution, mirroring the existing structures in the sphere of cultural production.

This non-confronting, mediated, parallel positioning that discursive practices choose to adopt, and on which they subsist in a somewhat parasitical relationship is problematic. In a critique of *unitednationsplaza* and its later version *Night School*, Andrea Phillips problematises the role of cultural commissioning in the context of “a very precise time of political, economic and social transformation in which specifically

Ibid. 31
Ibid. 32
Ibid. 33

34
Phillips, Andrea. “Public Acting: From Public Art to Art’s Publicity.” Unpublished Manuscript, 2011

35
Bennett, Tony. “Civic Laboratories: Museums, Cultural Objecthood, and the Governance of the Social / Tony Bennett.” *Cultural Studies* 19 (May 2005): 521-47; Bennett, Tony. “Sociology and Culture.” *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis*. Eds. Tony Bennett, and John Frow. London: Sage, 2008. 86-106; Bennett, Tony. “Culture Studies” and the Culture Complex.” *Handbook of Cultural Sociology*. Eds. John R. Hall, Laura Grindstaff, and Ming-Cheng Lo. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. 23-34; Bennett, Tony. “Making and Mobilising Worlds: Assembling and Governing the Other.” *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*. Eds. Tony Bennett, and Patrick Joyce. London and New York: Routledge, 2010. 190-208; Tony Bennett, and Chris Healy. Eds. *Assembling Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 2011.

European, and more generally Western concepts of social production are privately capitalised.”³⁴

Phillips, as well as Dumas, critique the recent ways in which curating and artistic practices have moved beyond the sphere of the exhibition in order to address their own relationship to the social, political and cultural conditions that surround the exhibition. It is following these critiques that I see a need to look more closely at the terminology of culture, especially as it is employed in the terms “cultural producer”, “cultural sphere” and “cultural conditions”, in order to think through the relationship between art and the social sphere. While this might not produce paradigms that are directly applicable to the role of curator and its relationship to the artist, the institution, or the public sphere, it will map out a series of suppositions for forms of agency, autonomy and responsibility to which the practice of curating, as a form of critical intervention in understanding contemporary social, cultural, political and economic conditions, aspires.

THE ‘CULTURE COMPLEX’

In describing the situation of the curator as a cultural producer, Tony Bennett’s notion of the ‘culture complex’³⁵ serves as a useful reference to work out the historical, social and political conditions that frame practice. What becomes discernible therein is the anticipation of a conundrum of practice: those politics of power that are ostensibly critiqued through making exhibitions or the generation of discourse through other media in which curators work, are also re-instituted every time they are articulated through practice. Writings around institutional critique and creative practices in the mass cultural industry have to a large

extent described this internalisation of action as a process of recuperation, benefitting the larger systems of production that are the target of critique.³⁶ However, they tend to treat the notion of culture as a property over which somebody can have ownership, typically in an essentialist, elitist or otherwise reductive manner. It is here that looking at Tony Bennett's writings on culture in the field of social sciences becomes useful, for they level the debate to a - at least momentarily - strictly analytical field of observation: "‘culture’ is - like ‘economy’, ‘society’, ‘technology’, and so on - one of those expansive words that designate apparently real structures of social life, but which on closer inspection tend to break down into myriad component parts without any necessary coherence."³⁷ After destructing the meaning of these words in a practical sense we can move on to an articulation of ‘culture’ and the ‘cultural’ in a theoretical sense. This allows us to think about the practice of curators aware of our own position within the ‘culture complex’ and to develop forms of curatorial practice that can still offer valuable forms of critique. This means to move beyond the articulation of the conundrum of cultural practices in the sense of performing a mere linguistic game.³⁸

When developing the notion of the ‘culture complex,’ in which culture is both an instrument of governance as well as its object, Bennett firstly establishes the need to differentiate between the notions of culture and the social, because “they are more usefully regarded as distinct if analysis is to engage adequately with the ways in which culture has been shaped into a historically distinctive means for acting on the social within the strategies of liberal government.”³⁹ Bennett critically engages with Stuart Hall’s definition of the social understood as “the product of a mobile set of relations of signification whose ‘fixings’ of the social through the relations between different discursive

36

Raunig, Gerald. “Creative Industries as Mass Deception.” *Critique of Creativity: Precarity, Subjectivity and Resistance in the ‘Creative Industries’*. Eds. Gerald Raunig, Gene Ray, and Ulf Wuggenig. London: MayFly, 2011. 191-204.

37

Bennett, Tony, and John Frow. “Introduction: Vocabularies of Culture.” *The Sage Handbook of Cultural Analysis*. Eds. Tony Bennett, and John Frow. London: Sage, 2008. 3.

38

Which also was one of Alberto Duman’s criticisms in Duman, Alberto. “When Travesty Becomes Form.” *Mute* 2.9, July 2008 (2008): 95.

39

Bennett, Tony. *Critical Trajectories: Culture, Society, Intellectuals*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

40

Ibid, 76.

41

Hall, Stuart. “The Centrality of Culture: Notes on the Cultural Revolutions of Our Time.” *Media and Cultural Regulation*. Ed. Kenneth Thompson. London: Sage, 1997. 222.

42

Ibid, 77.

43

Ibid

44

Foucault, Michel. *Ethics: The Essential Works*. Ed. Paul Rabinow, London: Allen Lane, 1997. 12.

positionalities that they effect is always provisional, incomplete, and on the way to being unfixed again.”⁴⁰ Culture, in relation to this, assumes a “constitutive condition of existence of social life”⁴¹ and functions like a language in that meaning is not lodged in the things themselves, but solely in their relations. Hall too, then, also does not speak of societies or social formations, but more generally of the ‘social’ as a set of relations between positions of meaning and forms of identity that are constructed discursively through mechanisms - culture, for example - which operate like systems of classification on which language draws. Hall and Bennett argue that every social relation is also, on another level, a cultural one. For Bennett, this not only makes it impossible to analyse the relation between culture and the social with respect to how the former acts upon the latter (for example, through art). It also fundamentally misunderstands the Foucauldian concept of discourse, which Hall aligns with the role of language as determining the systems of meaning that inform the processes of subjectification of social actors, which constitute the social.⁴² Instead, Bennett argues, “discursive practices [...] do not simply generate discourses as representations,”⁴³ but rather “take shape in technical ensembles, in institutions, in behavioural schemes, in types of transmission and dissemination, in pedagogical forms that both impose and maintain them.”⁴⁴

From the perspective of the social sciences, the idea of expertise gains an important function as a guiding principle that helps govern the social. “It is through the deployment of particular forms of expertise, in particular relations of government, that particular ways of speaking the truth and making it practical are connected to particular ways of acting on persons - and of inducing them to act upon themselves - which, in their turn, form particular ways of acting on the

social.”⁴⁵ Referring to Nicholas Rose, Bennett argues it is important to understand that expertise is not just accumulated experience but operates through various mechanisms (expressions, norms, beliefs) through which it is formed, ordered and cultivated: “These intellectual techniques do not come ready made, but have to be invented, refined, and stabilised, to be disseminated and implanted in different ways in different practices.”⁴⁶ Here, Rose adduces the school, the workplace and the family as examples where those mechanisms are at work and constantly stabilised. The exhibition, the lecture theatre, and the studio in the academy could also serve as examples of places where processes of subjectification are subsumed under specific forms that determine how experience is made meaningful in that they affect the way in which meaning is derived from information via interpretation. Of course, these spaces are not as formative for processes of subjectification as the family is, and I don’t mean to compare them to each other on equal terms. Here, I would simply like to stress that while curating is not in and of itself a determining force in the production of subjectification. The role of the curator needs to be aware of the level of expertise that is brought to the public space of the exhibition. More concretely, Bennett defines the expertise of a curator as a form “subjected to particular forms of validation and translated into particular technical forms through their inscription within particular technical apparatuses.”⁴⁷

The formulation of the role and importance of expertise enables Bennett to map out the ‘culture complex’ as a form of organisation of people and things, through which he is then able to differentiate more clearly the cultural from the social. In counter-positioning Hall and Rose, he arrives at a conception of the social that is not “constituted in and by the cultural representations through which relations of meaning and, as a part of these, differentiated social identities

45

Bennett, Tony. *Critical Trajectories: Culture, Society, Intellectuals*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. 77.

46

Rose, Nikolas. *Inventing Ourselves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 25.

47

Bennett, Tony. *Critical Trajectories: Culture, Society, Intellectuals*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007. 79.

48

Ibid, 78.

49

Tony Bennett, and Patrick Joyce, eds. *Material Powers: Cultural Studies, History and the Material Turn*. London: Routledge, 2010. 25

50

Ibid

51

Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction Into Actor-Network-Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. 175.

are formed”, but rather “takes the form of a set of relations and conducts that have been problematised in particular ways with a view to being acted on with specific governmental aims in view.”⁴⁸

The ‘culture complex’ is a new effective reality in which the social and the cultural are configured not as abstract domains, but in historically specific accounts. Theoretically both can be described as surfaces, but in reality they are specific constellations of people and things. To analyse these Bennett refers to Bruno Latour and the Actor-Network-Theory (ANT), suggesting that it provides useful models for the development of cultural analysis as it is “capable of illuminating how culture operates as a historically distinctive set of assemblages, the ‘culture complex’ [...], which act on the social in a variety of ways”.⁴⁹ As Bennett notes, Latour does not talk about culture on many occasions but is keen to clarify his perspective as one that counterposes the interests of sociology, namely “to bring light to hidden structures (of language or ideology) in order to account for social actions that the actors themselves are unaware of.”⁵⁰ He is interested in material processes that make culture, because it “does not act surreptitiously behind the actor’s back”, but is rather “manufactured at specific places and institutions.”⁵¹

NOTIONS OF PRACTICE – ‘MATERIALLY MADE’ VERSUS CONCEPTIONALLY INVENTED

Historical specificity is a very important aspect that cannot be stressed enough with regard to curating. The concept of culture needs to be interpreted as “a historically fabricated – in the sense of ‘materially made’ not ‘invented’ – set of entities [...] paying

attention to the processes – proceeding roughly in parallel with the production of the economy and the social – through which culture was produced as an autonomous realm that was made to stand apart from the social in order that it might then act back on it as a moralising, improving force.⁵² For curating, this stresses the fact that culture can never be thought of other than as historically contested ground of the governance of social relations. It is a complex of different strategies, knowledges, expertise, technologies and apparatuses, connected to a set of governmental forms of rule that give rise to power and specific modes of its exercise, acting on the social with specific agendas in view.

But the element of expertise is to be critically engaged with as it relates to curating in particular, because, as Bennett notes, the function of expertise is a form of ratification for museums ‘“new discursive strategy for enlisting objects in the service of government as part of programs of civic management aimed at promoting respect for, and tolerance of, cultural diversity.” This invites a questioning of the relationship between the role of the curator, and its function in relation to the notion of expertise: “And, although the curator’s role may be different, is this still not one performed in the service of government through the deployment of specific forms of expertise?”⁵³ Bennett only articulates the potentiality of this problematic, but other accounts might be needed to critically expand further on the concept of expertise in order to open up the possibility of speaking about a different kind of curating. One that is aware of its element of expertise, but that puts it into play not as a requirement for interpretation, but as a tool to create the communicative space of the exhibition, discursive project, or whatever other set or relations of things and people it devises.

Returning to the analysis of the concept of

52

Bennett, Tony. “Civic Laboratories: Museums, Cultural Objecthood, and the Governance of the Social / Tony Bennett.” *Cultural Studies* 19.5 (2005): 542.

53

Bennett, Tony. “The Art Museum as Civic Machinery.” *Sammlungen Ausstellen*. Eds. Beatrice Jaschke, Charlotte Martinz-Turek, and Nora Sternfeld. Wien: Turia + Kant, 2008. 212.

54

Rogoff, Irit. “Smuggling: A Curatorial Model.” *Under Construction: Perspectives on Institutional Practice*. Eds. Vanessa Joan Müller, and Nicolas Schaffhausen. Köln: Walther König, 2006. 132- 36.

55

Rus Bojan, Maria, Beatrice von Bismarck et al. “Letters to the Editors: Eleven Responses to Anton Vidokle’s “Art Without Artists?”” *e-flux Journal* 18 (September 2010). 8 Dec. 2012 <<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/letters-to-the-editors-eleven-responses-to-anton-vidokle-s-art-without-artists/>>.

the ‘culture complex’ and the question of how it can contribute to debates around forms of agency and the distribution of responsibilities in curating, it is important to return to the notion of curating as the organisation of the relation between people and things, mentioned at the very beginning. Evidently, after the discussion of the terminological relationship between ‘art’, the ‘social’, and ‘culture’, this notion is not to be understood as a generalisation, but as referring to a definition of the social as a flexible set of relations that are never entirely fixed, but always pertain to specific circumstances in terms of the intentions and expectations at stake. This notion of curating makes the case for perceiving the practice of the curator neither as simply the assembling and displaying of artworks (‘curating’, after Rogoff⁵⁴), nor as a mere speculative realm of thoughts that primarily serve to observe and reflect (the ‘curatorial’, after von Bismarck⁵⁵). Instead, curating assumes the function of a technology, and within it the curator, the artists, and all other “materially heterogeneous practices” that are “made up of bits and pieces of talk, architecture, bodies, text, machines, etc.” interact to construct the surface of the cultural— not in the interests of establishing some kind of general order between culture and the social, or between the artist and the curator, but only in order to explore this relationship in the very process of its making.

Recalling the lyrics of a Fleetwood Mac song may seem like an unlikely response to the critical discussions that took place during ST PAUL St's inaugural Curatorial Symposium. For all the well-articulated observations and considered criticisms on offer, the one thing I kept returning to was Kate Newby's work *You Make Loving Fun* (2009) – a plain-spoken column of bricks sprouting epiphyte foliage that is named after the Fleetwood Mac hit. Taking a closer look at Newby's piece on show at the Auckland Art Gallery the same week I had a sudden pop-cultural realisation that jettisoned my focus on curatorial issues. All these years of careless humming and inattentive alcohol-greased karaoke nights I had been singing not only the wrong lyrics, but words with exactly the opposite sentiment: You make *love and run*...

It is tempting to make analogous connections between Fleetwood Mac's notoriously entangled relationships and the triangulated link between artist, audience and curator. 'You Make Loving Fun' and/or 'You Make Love and Run' could sum up the attitudes and motivations with which we have zealously approached curatorial practices over the last 20 years.¹ Indeed, my

I NEVER DID BELIEVE IN THE WAYS OF MAGIC...
BUT I'M BEGINNING TO WONDER WHY

KATE BRETTKELLY-CHALMERS

meditation on these 80s soft-rock lyrics was in part prompted by Fresh Gallery Otara's outgoing director Ema Tavola, who shrewdly sidestepped a multitude of messy curatorial issues by simply declaring her love of all artists. Tavola evaded a stickier conversation about the role of curatorial frameworks in shaping our understanding of an artist's work, but her loved-up suggestion was received with open arms; it was something we all wanted to hear. In many ways the symposium's discussions presented the curator as someone possessing an ideal agency founded in human relationships. This was a curator-without-collection, someone who focused on the connection between artist and viewer and didn't have to come home to a storeroom full of pesky artworks.

Increasingly, curatorial discourses are something I force myself to think about. That Newby's sculpture played on my mind during the symposium sessions did indicate an unwillingness to stray too far from artwork itself, to never be completely subsumed by the discursive pleasures of a talkfest. But as much as I would like to, these sessions reminded me that it would be a romantic fool who located the art experience simply within a mythical

moment of encounter, free from the systems of power and politics that permeate the rest of our lives. Wiebke Gronemeyer also usefully reminded us that such discussions are in themselves subject to commodification. She warned against discursivity becoming a thing in and of itself; an object of exchange as opposed to a fruitful mode of production. In this sense, we might cynically think of the 'talk' as a checked-box on a list of relational activities associated with today's large-scale exhibitions.

Interestingly, Ute Meta Bauer's keynote presentation on curating dOCUMENTA (11) described a model whereby discussion was deployed in an attempt to overcome the centripetal focus on traditional European art centres. dOCUMENTA (11)'s global network of discursive 'platforms' famously sought to challenge the fixed geographic coordinates and time-frames of conventional Eurocentric shows. While the symposium's ideal 'curator-without-collection' seemed removed from institutional responsibilities, this curator was definitely not detached from geographic and political dilemmas.

Being geographically outside the traditional centre, but nonetheless within the aegis of 'Western society', I wondered about

the curious relationship Aotearoa has to the model presented by dOCUMENTA (11). The symposium was framed by a reflective mechanism hinging on a distinction between inside and outside – traditional exclusion and contemporary inclusion. I am loath to acknowledge that the current discussions of art in New Zealand are still informed by a cultural cringe that overtly favours European and American art worlds. This was hinted at both by *Artforum* writer Anthony Byrt's disclosure of surprise at his publication's willingness to include news from this side of the globe, and by Vera Mey's alternate reorientation towards the Asia-Pacific region. Although taking very different tacks, both speakers tussled with a system that sees New Zealand gazing toward the Continent as a benchmark of success or reactively turning away from it.

Is this engagement with a globalised art world and its resources something by which we are valuing current art practices? ST PAUL St's curatorial symposium was itself preceded by a panel discussion on the occasion of Artspace's 25th anniversary that acknowledged the growing diversity of frameworks for viewing contemporary art since it had been established in the late 1980s. Museum shows

no longer exist as a salve for the market's inadequacies. Dealers are doing critically innovative exhibitions, artist-run spaces don't look like artist-run spaces, collectives such as the late Gambia Castle don't seem to fit any particular format, and groups such as Alterations and Local Time are not chained to a physical gallery space at all. Without our customary viewing structures are we turning towards the international to gauge the merit of our work?

This year's Walters Prize judges found themselves in an odd position when they nominated four no doubt deserving overseas exhibitions that not all of the judges had been able to visit. This minor absurdity suggests that Aotearoa's relationship to Europe is not as clear-cut as an inside/outside binary might have it and that the tired discourses that pit the local against the global are similarly inadequate. Increasingly, the Continent is not an amorphous other, but is being filled with specific places, locations and galleries.

Once again I am reminded of the ease by which Newby's *You Make Loving Fun* engages with Carl Andre's totemic minimalist work *Lever*. She flips his horizontal sculpture upright; it becomes a structure that clings to the

wall just as its tendrils of organic foliage cling to its crevices. Newby does not make an overt reference to Andre nor does she capitulate, in an act of outright reverence. There is no hint at clever and ironic appropriation; Newby does not flinch in this engagement. While *You Make Loving Fun* made some much-needed corrections to my pop-cultural knowledge, Newby's work offers a more fruitful lesson in sailing over and away from the customary reflexes of the cultural cringe.

(1) In a paper given by Greg Minissale that week, I was also reminded that Newby's title could possibly be referring to another famous, far more troubled relationship, between the sculptors Ana Mendieta and Carl Andre. The latter's seminal minimalist piece *Lever* (1966) is no doubt a clear point of reference for Newby's upturned stack of bricks. A potential reference to Mendieta and Andre's troubled partnership, notoriously ending in Mendieta's suspicious fatal fall from a high window, is gently hinted at. *You Make Love and Run* would have been a much more accurate title, in that case