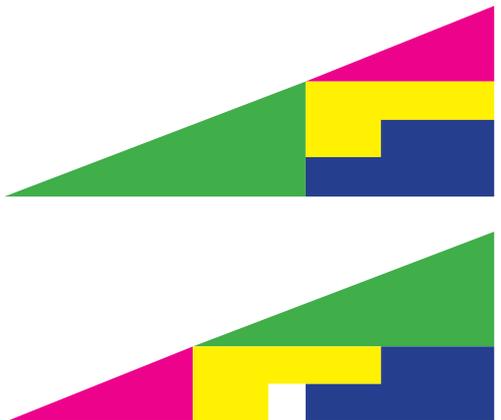

The Contingency of Curation

Symposium

Tate Britain, May 21st 2010



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Debating Contingency and

the Lens of the Paradigm

Introduction / Editorial

The Contingency of Curation is a project led by three groups of postgraduate curating students from Chelsea College of Art and Design, the University of Essex and Sheffield Hallam University.

Since 2008 Amanda Beech, Course Director MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice, Chelsea College of Art and Design, Jaspar Joseph-Lester, MA Contemporary Fine Art (Curating), Sheffield Hallam University, and Matthew Poole, Programme Director, Centre for Curatorial Studies, University of Essex have facilitated yearly projects with interim events and a final 'outcome' - this has involved exhibition making, talks, and the publication Project Biennale, launched at the Venice Biennale 2009 with a review and press conference exhibition held at SIA Gallery Sheffield, June 10-11th 2009 (www.projectbiennale.tk).

This year the project once again sought to address current explorations and analysis of the curatorial. However, in taking a conference format the project not only demanded that we think through the debates that remain central to it, but also the format of the conference as a choreographed event in itself. The format and content of the conference as well as its guiding theme were established over a series of seminars and events held throughout the year. In these meetings students and staff came together to present and reflect upon what they felt was most urgent and most at stake in the context of working as a curator, or even being curated by one. From these conversations, the state of curating as collaboration and the nature of the discipline of curating now as a form of practice took root in our discussion. Here, we focused on how apparently the creativity of new forms of expression produced through curation and the commitment to the discipline of curation itself stood at the centre of this discussion. We spoke about how the academicisation of curation in a plethora of curatorial programmes – programmes that we were all a part of - seemed to run smoothly alongside the fact that the operations and place of curation are increasingly diverse and ubiquitous. No longer is it easy to understand

curation as the work of the promoter, the interior decorator, or the guardian of our history. Instead, the context of curation in respect to its art, its artists, its managers, its bureaucrats and the primacy of the organizational that it forefronts produced ever urgent questions around the politics of creativity and how culture is made public.



These questions began from a critique of the curatorial as a form of knowledge production, with the question of 'the public' in its sights; the ethical imperative that has argued that curators need art and vice versa, and the role of the curatorial in terms of our association with it both historically and in its contemporary form as one of power.

This question of the power of the curatorial intersected these various issues emerging from the group's discussions, and developed our focus to the theme of contingency; that is, how we might understand curation in terms of those other forces that situate it, drive it, and affect it. This question, of the contingency of curation, becomes more pronounced when we can speak of a 'curatorial turn'. This has meant effectively that both art and curating share a common interest in the structure and delivery, as well as the content, of their culture. A curatorial consciousness, it seems, is implicit to artists' work even when no curator is present. Whilst on the other hand, the artistic value of curation is

highlighted, perhaps more than ever, when curation has operated without art. However, curation, in its expanded field of public commissions, urban architectural developments, social community projects, commercial galleries and academic research is an organizational system that seems to highlight the increasingly instrumentalised role for culture whether it gets done by artists or curators. Here, economic development is now a leading factor for public art and art in public, and is tied to the more general claim that art improves our well-being and our quality of life.

Further to this, recent culture has been ever more concerned with the powers that distribute and represent art, to the point that these various strategies of organization that define the curatorial have increasingly become the subject matter and operation of artists' work. With this aspect of the ubiquity of the organizational and the contingency of the curatorial in mind, the role of curation in this expanded field urges us to think more carefully about the social, aesthetic and political impact curation has for our culture. Indeed, the ubiquity of the curatorial means that a question of the public is at stake as much as art.

These factors led us to our central premise, that despite the diversity of processes that make up the curatorial, its explicit presence and artistic culture, and its power to organize the reception and distribution of art, curation nevertheless seems to struggle to transform the conditions within which it operates. This question itself sought to de-stabilize the myth that so often goes with the curatorial: that it has power beyond its recognition; that it makes and breaks careers; and, that without curators artists do not have a public. This matter of contingency then turns out to ruin some of the hopes that curation could transform society for the better because it is considered to be 'more free' to do so. But, at the same time the idea of this power as some totalizing demonic force was also dampened. Taking away the power that we may have once attributed to a process that organizes the things around us can be scary and leaves us in a destabilized condition. But it is a position that has its own force and potential, and so we set about pursuing exactly what this might mean now for curatorial discourse and its contexts.

So, armed with this general consensus, three groups representing each college went to work on developing a panel for the conference that would be made up of artists, theorists, private and public gallery curators, as well as public policy makers. These panels entitled, "The Autonomous Curator",

“Mediation as Production - Collaboration, Authorship and Contingency”, and “Curating Friction: Between Complicity and Contingency”, took up the theme from these specific discourses.

The first panel, “The Autonomous Curator”, looked to the role of the curator as a singular author/auteur, working either inside or outside of institutions. The panel discussed how this personae is more dominant today than it has ever been and how in recent years this has been especially compounded by the increasing growth and popularity of trans-national shows and Biennales that have further moved the contemporary curator away from the traditionally invisible mediating role into an increasingly internationally recognised autonomous figure. This panel primarily asked what the character and scope of this prevalent autonomy is for ‘the Curator’ today, and whether or not the ‘hired-gun’, such as Nicolas Bourriaud or Beatrice von Bismark as guest curators of the last two Tate Triennials, has more freedom to exercise greater creativity in the processes of making art visible. The panel included papers and presentations by Emma Dexter, former Senior Curator at Tate Modern and currently Head of Exhibitions at Timothy Taylor Gallery, London, Mary-Anne McQuay, Curator at Spike Island, Bristol, and Emily Pethwick, Director of The Showroom, London.



*Panel 1: “The Autonomous Curator,”
(from L to R: Emma Dexter, Marie-Anne McQuay,
Emily Pethwick, and Matthew Poole)*



*Panel 2: “Mediation as Production”
(from L to R: Richard Birkett, Kypros Kyprianou,
Simon Hollington, Daniela Cascella, Lucia Farinati,
Ron Wright, and Neil Webb)*

Panel two specifically focussed on the blurring of the separation between the roles of curator and artist, that is emphasised by an increase in collaborative practices and artists increasingly taking on the tasks of the curator. The panel discussed the notion of authorship as a means to explore how this might highlight how curation is no longer a central column of power in the art world. The panel featured Daniela Cascella and Lucia Farinati (Sound Threshold), and artists Simon Hollington and Kypros Kyprianou, plus Neil Webb and Ron Wright. This group of artists and curators were invited to respond to the theme of the panel with a range of media and presentational formats. Richard Birkett, assistant curator at the ICA, chaired the panel discussion and gave a response to the panel theme. Students from the group contributed to the event by projecting live subtitling of the panel discussion and distributing cards with a mobile telephone number for the audience to text questions to the panel. The images and texts that follow extend what developed into a highly mediated, multi-authored event to again ask if these expanded curatorial practices challenge received notions of creative agency.

The third and final panel of the day looked to how cultural projects are playing an increasingly important role within urban regeneration programmes and

how the curator, bearing the cachet of producing a mix of cultural capital and creative critique, is a desirable agent for the proliferation of cultural and economic wealth. This panel asked: Complicit within these systems can the curator still be radical? Can critical friction exist within these curatorial practices? Where is the curator positioned within this tension between complicity and contingency? Here, students decided to construct, as much as they could, the conditions of a head-to-head dialogical debate mediated by Andrea Phillips and featuring Munira Mirza and Roman Vasseur. Both Vasseur, as lead artist of Harlow New Town's artistic regeneration project in 2009, and Mirza, as advisor to the Mayor of London on strategy for Arts and Culture focusing on the Cultural Olympiad and 2012, have lived the role of the mediator and producer in the realm of public art and urban regeneration.



*Panel 3: "Curating Friction"
(from L to R: Andrea Phillips, Munira Mirza,
and Roman Vasseur)*

The themes taken up by the conference panels were then structured around three main tropes of curatorial practice. However, the aim of organizing this diverse range of perspectives and approaches was not to make claims for the curatorial as a site for knowledge production, nor was it to embark on yet another expanded reading of curating. Perhaps more importantly, this range of curatorial practices were not set against one another and did not follow a now familiar line of argument that posits the organization of open-ended social encounters against the authorial hand of the autonomous curator. The strategy

was rather to create a platform for self-reflection and critique; for each panel to interrogate the curatorial position that the speakers themselves occupied; and for this series of discussions and presentations to mark out a particular set of interests (while, at the same time, acknowledging the problems and difficulties that exist within their own areas of practice). This unfolding of both the scope and complexity of the curatorial provided some insight into how the organization systems that are understood to hold power are themselves a highly contested and fragmented field of relations.

On the way to choosing the selection of speakers and art works that they hoped might feature in the conference, the students developed the blog contingencyofcuration.org and began to collate shared resources that would extend and expand this discussion. In a series of meetings we came together traveling up and down the country, sitting in (fairly hot) seminar rooms, the upstairs meeting rooms of galleries and in cramped studios, each time the groups solidified ideas for the debate that they wanted and also imagined how this would be achieved and manufactured.



Pre-event seminar at Wimbledon College of Art Gallery

A key event that allowed the groups to bring this curatorial imagination to light was an extended seminar and public event held at Wimbledon College of Art Gallery on March 29th 2010. Here students debated their panels by ventriloquising the arguments of the speakers they had invited. This live

rehearsal process in its panto-style format, in all its messiness, further crowbarred open the discussion to new territories, allowing the interrogation of positions and choices, and formatted and focussed the interpretative work going on before us. The event culminated in a reprisal of the famous Radio 4 comedy panel game *Just a Minute!*. Here with subjects such as 'The Shoreditch Art Scene', 'Rejection Letters', and 'How Nicolas Bourriard Changed My Life', the sessions were typically competitive, enjoyably frustrating and had the same high-energy comedy etiquette that hesitation, repetition, and deviation invoke. However, the haphazard but polite fun of the event also drew out some real concerns that students face now not just in the critical position that their practice might take vis-à-vis research areas, histories, and contexts, but also in particular what this event revealed was just how significant the content of curatorial practice plays to and within the anxieties around participating in the world of curation. Questions of success, even a temporal acceptance into this 'curatorial world', and how key players seem to wield so much control in it, then obviously have explicit impact on students' attitudes, beliefs and choices. In these live debates leading to the final conference the question of what issues and debates curation looked to face now became increasingly hinged upon the need for students to transform the current agendas of the curatorial context in which they are now entering as professionals.



'Just-a-Minute' at Wimbledon College of Art Gallery

These factors highlight another more personal level to the question of contingency, that is, the situation that students, young curators and other

cultural producers find themselves within: current neo-liberal politico-economic agendas as well as various cultures of critique. Whilst these forms that govern and direct our approach to culture seem to hold within them an apparent tolerance for all modes of expression, the fact that certain rules must be followed, people must be pleased and money must be generated are their actualization. Bearing this forth, the foundation for such agreements emerged as a concluding issue in the final conference plenary and whilst tying up the day's event left the groups and the audience with more questions that are now directed to a future.

This publication has been produced as both a document of the conference proceedings and a record of the processes that led to that event. It is structured to mirror the running order of the conference, in that it has three sections that reflect the presentations, discussions and atmosphere of each of the three panels. For the sake of practical efficiency and continuity, the three groups of students each developed and managed one of the three panels whilst remaining in constant contact via meetings, email, and blogging throughout the whole project. In this way, they can be said to collectively 'own' the project, whilst at the same time having a relative freedom to produce and choreograph their own panels. This book works in the same way, with each of the groups planning and producing its three main sections. To complement this publication there are further resources including bibliographical references, websites, exhibitions and other projects that have informed this project on the website: www.contingencyofcuration.org

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Panel 1

The Autonomous Curator

MA Gallery Studies and Critical Curating

University of Essex



INTRODUCTION

by Monique Kent

The role of the curator as a singular author/auteur, working either inside or outside of institutions, is more dominant today than it has ever been. In recent years this has been especially compounded by the increasing growth and popularity of trans-national shows and Biennales that have further moved the contemporary curator away from the traditionally invisible mediating role into an increasingly internationally recognised autonomous figure.

This panel will principally ask what the character and scope of this prevalent autonomy is for 'the Curator' today, and how and if the influence of the autonomous curator on museums, galleries and artists differs from that of the institutional curator. For example, does the 'hired-gun' have more freedom to exercise greater creativity in the processes of making art visible?

Second, according to David Levi Strauss, in his 2006-7 article 'The Bias of the World: Curating after Szeemann and Hops', "without history, 'the new' becomes a trap: a sequential recapitulation of past approaches with no forward movement. This is a major occupational hazard for curators." Following this, we will ask if the independent curator can work both within and outside of specific institutions with an enhanced degree of autonomy today. Does this autonomy then necessitate them becoming perpetually stuck in the present or can and should they retain a sense of history, and how might they do this?

The third element of this panel will probe the usefulness and productive imperative of the massive global visibility of curators of international blockbuster shows and biennales; asking if and how the appointment of an internationally recognised curator for a biennale or any such exhibition affects the content, meanings, or values produced by the exhibition.

The invited speakers for this panel work across various disciplines. These include curating, writing, lecturing and as practicing artists. Several of the speakers work or have worked for specific institutions, while at the same time working independently also. Such diverse curatorial experiences will generate debate and discussion on the role and the perception of the curator today and the level and necessity of their autonomy.

I am delighted to be able to introduce to you our guest speakers for the panel this morning: Emma Dexter is Director of Exhibitions at Timothy Taylor Gallery, London; Marie-Anne McQuay is Curator at Spike Island, Bristol, and; Emily Pethwick is Director of The Showroom Gallery, London. And finally, the session will be chaired by Matthew Poole, freelance curator and Programme Director of the Centre for Curatorial Studies, and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Art History & Theory at The University of Essex.

We have planned that the format for this panel will run counter to the usual practice for conferences of this type in that we will begin the conference with a discussion format. Each speaker will briefly present questions issues or contingences regarding independent curatorial practice, as well as reflecting on their own practices. Following this, these issues will be discussed by all of the panellists, and then there will be time for questions from the audience.

So, now i'll hand over to Matthew.

Matthew Poole (Chair): Thank you Monique. Welcome everyone and thank you for coming. I have been asked to step in at the last minute to chair this panel as sadly JJ Charlesworth can't be with us today. So, already we are dealing with contingencies here.

Each of our panellists will speak for about five minutes and then we will move to a discussion up here on stage, and then we'll open this out to questions from you, the audience. I will try to keep my role in the discussion within the remit of moderator, to keep the discussion on track around the issues that have been outlined in the abstract that Monique, Kate, and Aimilia prepared, which you just heard.

So, Emma, if I can invite you to go first.

Emma Dexter: I'm just going to make a few observations first of all and then I'll show a few illustrations of recent projects that I've done.

Obviously, we're here to discuss the role of the curator in general and specifically to interrogate the nature of the phenomenon of the international global jet-setting superstar curator. I don't know whether you've got any of those on this panel today.

(Laughs, and laughter from the audience)

I wanted to preface my remarks with remembering what it was like when I first obtained a job as an assistant curator in Stoke-on-Trent Museum and Art Gallery in 1985, and how despite the fact that Harald Szeemann and others that you referenced in your introduction had already done incredible shows by that time. I am not quite sure how aware I was of their contributions at that time, but the greatest influence on me and what I was doing then was quite frankly Charles Saatchi's programme at Boundary Road in North London. I was very interested in and aware of the new New York School of the 1980s, with figures like Jeff Koons, etc. But, at the same time, working in a place like Stoke-on-Trent I was extremely aware that I needed to be connecting with a local audience. So, the idea of doing something international seemed completely out of the question. I also felt that I needed ... that it was very important to be programming things that would attract a local audience. It was a very political role, if you like.

And so, I've brought two catalogues to show you that I did when I was there and they show something of what I managed to achieve at that time. They look very crude and strange now. One was called 'Palaces of Culture', and that was because I was working in a contemporary fine art context within a city museum that is based on a very specific and localised industry, the potteries industry, and in some senses the whole history of the potteries and the very tangible history that that whole area bred and the sense of place, the sense of belonging that everyone who lived there had, this struck me really powerfully. In some ways I can see that it affected all the programming decisions that I made when I was there. At the same time, then that very specificity gave you something that you wanted to kick against. So, for example, I was very interested in the Black British Art Movement at the time, which was very vociferous in its critique of British institutional practice and museum practice at that time. And so, I involved lots of those artists in the programme very specifically knowing that Stoke was a very 'white' place as well, predominantly at that time. The exhibition 'Palaces of Culture' was specifically for the artists to come in to the museum and to critique it as a museum, and it gave them an opportunity to work with the collections and make a work in response to that. I think that was one of the first times, back in 1986-7, that someone, certainly in the UK, had done something like that – to try to make a connection between the site of the museum and contemporary art practice. So, I invited artists like Mark Wallinger, and Lubaina Himid, and Langlands and Bell.

The other thing that I have brought today is a catalogue that I haven't looked at for about twenty years, which is called 'Green Meets Gray'. This was an open submission competition of photography, where we asked the people of Stoke to make work, to document, to do whatever they wanted. I suppose it was partly because I wanted to create something that meant that the museum was a receiving house for what people were making in the area, without forcing anything in particular. I was aware that in that area there were numerous photography clubs and photography was a really important artistic and social outlet for a very wide variety of people. So, we put on this exhibition and we also made a commission around the garden festival that was happening at the time.

I just want to juxtapose those two projects, and, in a way, reveal that you can, and if you're in a position to, think about ways to work with the local community and actually bring 'making' by anybody in to the institution. This is something that I haven't always been able to do, and I certainly remember that when I was at the ICA, I was very interested in trying to find ways of working with material that had not been, shall we say, officially sanctioned, and not been made by people who had been to art school, but by people just wanting to do something. I wanted to do something there with an untrained artist, and I wasn't able to do it and I regret that now. I see now that when James Brett set up his 'Museum of Everything' at Tate Modern last week he finally managed to achieve that.

I think the reasons why we don't take those sorts of risks; and as I describe this I am talking of the absolute antithesis of the global uber-curator who makes their mark on the world by status of association with already very well established and very well thought after artists, the whole connection with money and capital, how expensive a project is – all of these are attractors for international curators and artists – but just to say that certainly the work that I've always wanted to do is, and was always within a programme, wanting to have a very broad sense of texture, if you like, and that any rule was there to be broken, if possible, within the constraints that you work with. Those constraints are quite considerable; because they are normally financial, or they are normally colleagues' anxieties about whether you're going to get an audience for the project you want to do. So, all of these things act as constrictions.

I was also thinking about what artists want in their relationship with a curator.

The other thing, that isn't discussed in the proposition about the uber-curator for this panel, is the whole question of a solo exhibition by an artist. What role does that play? It's presumably something that we aren't going to discuss today at all. And yet, I would argue that most artists are best served by the collaboration with and almost invisibility of the hand of the curator; that your job, certainly when I was growing up, you understood your job as a curator to be quite an invisible role in terms of being a kind of guide to the artist in regard to how best to present themselves, how to manage the material of their oeuvre, and how to make it speak to a much wider audience. So, certainly some of the things that I am most quietly proud of are solo exhibitions in which I think I might have brought some clarity to an artist's practice that wasn't there before, or that hasn't always been made manifest. For example, with the Luc Tuymans show that I did for Tate Modern, for me I thought that that worked very well in the case of an artist about whom many people had said that they hadn't understood what his work was about before they saw that show. That was two years in the planning and in the making, and it's everything from how you construct the catalogue to the publicity materials in terms of how you transmit the particular message. It's really important that you as a curator are not foregrounding yourself there; that the whole thing is about that particular artist. But obviously, clearly as a curator I think you do have a lot of fun working on group exhibitions, that's for sure. That is where your personality, your interests and your ego can all have some degree of reign and expression.

So now, these images are of some things that I've done recently.

This is the most recent project, which is the only time I think that I've been invited to curate something outside of this country. It was in Vitoria in Spain, and was a couple of years ago. This was a collaboration with a gallery called Montehermoso Art Centre in Vitoria, which is the capital of the Basque region. So, this is a group exhibition about community and living together. It included Mati-Thu Perret, who I now work with at Timothy Taylor Gallery, Josephine Meckseper, Daniel Baker, Delaine LeBas, and Nicole Eisenman. The exhibition was

about community and about communities in flux, and in crisis, and how people are making new communities. It is always import for me that, and this is something that's not always included in biennales etc., that you use media such as painting to discuss difficult subjects. In this case, the work of Nicole Eisenman, you have figures wading in shit. On the right hand side that is a work called 'Brooklyn Beer Garden' that is a portrait of a community of artists in New York, but there are many death-like elements hovering in the background. So, it's about how even in a very outmoded unfashionable medium like painting one can be discussing issue that are just as relevant as video or photography or installation. And for me it's just always important that there are media in a show to which a very wide audience is going to be able to relate.

This is an exhibition that I organised at Timothy Taylor Gallery when I first got there. Again, it's something, I suppose, very much under the influence of Harald Szeemann, that I have always enjoyed doing, which is combining historical works with very contemporary work completely within the same space. So, here we have work by Oskar Schlemmer alongside works by Dirk Stewen, and we have works by Marcus Amm and Thomas Zipp, etc. So, it's almost like a mini museum. And actually moving in to the private sector has allowed me greater freedom in this way, which I didn't enjoy so much working at Tate Modern. Having said that though, one of the things, apart from working on major exhibitions in Tate Modern's programmes, there was some freedom when working on the shows for the level two gallery, and in a way you can see the style and character of the sorts of things that I like to do in this little series.

So I've just picked images from three little exhibitions that I did there, and this was the most recent one that I mounted almost after I'd left; with Anselm Reyle, and Thomas Scheibitz and Manfred Kuttner. Kuttner was an artist who was a participant alongside Polke and Richter in very forward looking exhibitions coming out of the Düsseldorf Art Academy in the early 1960s. And very sadly he decided to cease being an artist in order to support his family. His peers, Richter and Polke, went on to have the careers that they had, and he became a graphic designer in a paint factory. I found his work by accident and was immediately attracted to its freshness and its contemporaneity, and I decided spontaneously that it would work well alongside Reyle and Scheibitz. It was a wonderful accidental meeting of histories. For me it was completely based on superficial appearances quite frankly. But later I discovered that Manfred Kuttner had escaped from Eastern Germany in order to come to study in Düsseldorf, before the Berlin Wall had been erected and so Thomas Scheibitz was really overwhelmed and moved to meet him. And it gave Manfred, who was dying of terminal cancer at the time, an opportunity to show in Tate Modern, which was the most extraordinary end to his short-lived career. So, this level two gallery, for me, was a real godsend in terms of providing you with an opportunity to change things and insert things into a museum in which there is a huge number of things going on. It shows how the work you do as a curator changes people lives, literally, and hopefully for good.

And finally, a very quick run through Media Burn, which was a look at media, fashion, and advertising. This was the first time that Martha Rosler's work had been shown at Tate Modern, surprisingly. We commissioned Josephine Meck-seper to make a new installation in the strange little window there. Jens Ulrich did a very nice installation. And also interestingly, it gave us the opportunity to look at the work of Peter Kennard, who is somebody who I knew from the 1980s who worked principally as a deeply committed graphic artist and col-lagist, and this was certainly the first time that Peter's work had been seen in the context of Tate. As a result the museum actually acquired quite a lot of his original collages, and they are now in the collection. So, again, accidentally an important move, and something that was important for the Tate collection.

And finally finally, another exhibition, called 'Rings of Saturn', borrowing its name from a work by W. G. Sebald, in which I juxtaposed Thomas Zipp and Thomas Helbig and a host of other people like Steve Claydon and David Noonan and David Wojnarowicz.

And that's the end.

MP: Great. Well, thank you very much Emma. We now move on to our second speaker, Marie-Anne McQuay.

Marie-Anne McQuay: Thanks. I've chosen to do a close reading of the abstract for this panel as my way of responding. I haven't brought any images, so you'll be staring at the logo on screen for the next five minutes.

I want to begin by exploring what is at stake in the term 'autonomy', and why it is problematic, but also why it is a necessary term for us to use.

Secondly, one of the phrases within the abstract really stood out to me – this idea that we are seeking to transform the conditions within curating operates - and I am really interested to know what we are transforming and how.

Thirdly, because I will be asking more questions than I'll be answering, I will try myself to define what autonomy and transformation mean to me. So, we'll see how we go.

Firstly, autonomy: I imagine we will, or possibly will, debate as a panel the relative merits of independent versus institutional curatorial autonomy. These are positions now that shift back and forth. It's much more usual that one may be independent then institutional then back again. But, should we first consider whether this preoccupation with the notion of autonomy is entirely healthy. Is it a nostalgic hangover from mid-twentieth century anxieties of the Frankfurt School; part of our Modernist fantasy that there is such a thing as autonomy? I suppose in its most problematic form it conjures up to me the image of the solitary creative genius certain in their innate aesthetic judgement. So, there is

this idea of autonomy as ego, or as this curator-connoisseur.

Also, curating isn't autonomous. That's an unrealistic hope, if you have that hope. As Emma reflected, it's incredibly contingent because of many factors, whether you are institutional or a 'gun-for-hire'. So, it's dependent on art and ideas, but it's also dependent on funding and brokering and permission; quite a lot of permission.

So, autonomy is an interesting problematic term to use, now maybe more so in the twenty-first century. However, I can't think of a better word to stand in for it, as shorthand for intellectual freedom, and I am aware that freedom itself is a very loaded and problematic term itself. I guess it's most easy to identify where you have lost autonomy rather than where you have it. So, I, as someone who works in the public sector, and have done so for the past thirteen years, am aware when it has been under threat from instrumentalising social policies, where it comes under threat from the market, and latterly more so within art schools where it's under threat from the Knowledge Transfer system that we're all enthralled to. So, there is this idea that everything we do 'outputs' to the creative industries.

From that latter bind that people find themselves in, the Knowledge Transfer imperative, we have seen emerge (I think it's one of the roots anyway – I'll be interested to see what everyone else thinks) the notion of the independent pedagogical collective; the model of the independent art school being one. I am not presuming to say that I've just noticed 'The Educational Turn' in curating – it would be a bit late in the day if I had – but, it's interesting to note that our current 'Utopia Station' or 'gallery as platform' and 'gallery as laboratory' models are, I suppose, the terms I started to inherit when I was studying. So maybe the independent art school is this new bastion for open-ended peer-led cross-disciplinary research. By which I mean, simply a group of people getting together and declaring themselves as a school.

That model of practice tends to work towards its own ideal. It tends to have a manifesto that is open-ended, collaborative, communitarian, and entirely and explicitly contingent. I was trying to say that maybe one could describe it as having multiple autonomies, which is probably a very pretentious thing to try to say. But, what I mean is really that you are allowed to have your field of research, but you also essentially collaborate. I think it might be interesting if we talk about that model, because in a way I guess the major shift from biennale culture that I noticed happened was when Manifesta, maybe six years ago, was posed as an art school. It's the project that didn't happen in Nicosia, but it happened in different forms. So, that's one possible route.

So, that's autonomy, in a collaborative sense.

My second point is to reflect on the question of 'what are we realistically seeking to transform through the act of curation?' And it's just that line that stood out for me in the abstract for this panel.

I don't know the answer to this, and I'm interested to debate it today.

Are we now, in the twenty-first century, seeking to transform the organisation of knowledge? That's what curators used to do. Are we seeking to transform the conditions of art's production, its reception, and its mediation? Are we seeking to transform to pull the focus back out from our narrow field, the hierarchies that are in the art world, its power structures, and its preference for free labour? I guess that I might bring in the spectre of unionisation within the public sector. I am a public sector worker and I know that the visual arts is the least unionised of any of the public sectors; certainly in the UK this is the case. I usually leave the 'revolution comrades' speech to the proper Marxists, but I think because all of us are waiting with baited breath to see what will happen next on our tiny island vis-a-vis the General Election this month, the idea of unions, or at least collective action, should be more present in our minds. Having said that, I am also a classic 24-hour cultural worker, so I undermine my own rights, in a sense, as we all do in this business. That is the conundrum we have.

So, that was 'what are we transforming?' I haven't answered it, I am just asking.

Finally, point three. It is probably heresy for me to say in the context of a curating conference, and as someone who studied curating at masters level, that my main interest in the field of curating doesn't lie in its discourses, however self-reflexive they are. It is part of my interest, but I am also interested in the fact that curation intersects with so many different fields of specialism. So, it is interesting because it intersects with philosophy, with aesthetics, with politics, with museology (I don't have a museums background, so I am only ever an amateur if I move in to that field), and it allows you to be an interested amateur in lots of different areas and connect them and bring them together.

The other aspects I value most, and is most connected to whatever you might call my curatorial practice, are the encounters that it affords; mainly encounters with artists. And I thought that I ought to bring them in right at the end of my presentation. I suppose I have worked essentially, over the last ten years, entirely collaboratively. I have mainly worked on solo projects, so that was interesting that Emma brought that up: how you value that, where is the curatorial (?). I am quite happy to surrender authorship. But I guess that it is those dialogues that one has with artists, the collaborations, the opportunity to take a leap of faith on a project in its early stages, to persuade your funders that you know what will happen and all of its effects (I think we've all been there with that one). So, perhaps I suppose, I am claiming that I reserve the right in my curatorial autonomy to invest in uncertainties, and indulge in risk within the public sector, and that's probably the most important aspect of curatorial autonomy that I would seek to maintain.

That is my final proposition. Thank you.

MP: Wonderful. Thank you very much Marie-Anne. So, we'll move on to Emily.

Emily Pethwick: I'm going to also talk from my own perspective.

I wouldn't describe myself as an autonomous curator in any respect. I've mainly been working in art institutions, and over the last five years I've been working as a gallery director, which is actually a very different role to a curator, although I have been responsible for the programming in each of the institutions that I've led. I've predominantly been working in small organisations, so I'll show some images from those.

This is CASCO, which is an office for art, design and theory in Utrecht in the Netherlands. Currently, at the Showroom, we've just moved to a new building in the Church Street neighbourhood, which is just off Edgware Road, and this space has been open since September, 2009.

My position as a curator in a small organisation is always contingent on the context that I'm working in, situated with a whole set of relations. For example, working between artists, institutions and site, as well as audiences and funders. My work has predominantly involved commissioning artists, therefore much of the time is spent in the roles of facilitator, fundraiser and project manager as well as conversation partner. All of which I consider to be far from autonomous positions. Also, as a director, I am working under the supervision of a board and funding bodies, managing staff and steering the organisation as a whole. I also think it's rare, in a way, that any curatorial situation can be considered as entirely autonomous. Even those curators that are parachuting in to international contexts have to deal with a lot of local politics, and they often rely on local facilitators to realise their work. So, it's never a completely autonomous position. And they are also being commissioned to fulfil particular roles, which have agendas set to them.

I think what connects with the organisations that I've worked in is a question of independence. Before working at CASCO I was at Cubitt gallery, and both CASCO and Cubitt are artist-originated artist-run organisations, and they are very proud of their independence. The Showroom is not really artist-led, but it also has a twenty year history of being an independent space. The programmes that I've realised in these three organisations have been very specifically constructed in response to the conditions in which I've been working. So, for example working in London I've been working with tiny budgets, trying to realise quite ambitious things. And so there's an extreme kind of risk taking, which Marie-Anne brought up. That, in a way, does factor what you can do, but it also creates an interesting situation to work in, in that you have to be very creative with what you have, and you often have to rely on various kinds of relationships that you forge in order to make things happen.

Similarly, in Utrecht, although in The Netherlands there is much better funding for such types of organisations, I was working in a small provincial Dutch city

and there are only certain things that you can do and that work in that context. So, you can't really have free reign because you also have to think about who your audience is, who the local constituents are, etc. Now, at the Showroom, I am working in a neighbourhood that is enthusiastic about us being there. In fact, our move came about because of local enthusiasm for us moving there, which is quite a rare situation I think in London. So, that's something that I think has real potential for us to be working with.

These are the kind of things that I think make this kind of work interesting, which I think doesn't come in to it if you're working in a context that you don't know. A lot of what I've done, that comes out of working in these places, has been a building up of a local knowledge. A number of the commissions that I have realised with artists have been based on really detailed research into site and have employed the networks that we've built over time in working on the programmes in these spaces.

So, I think, this way of working with an awareness of where one is situated is not feasible if one is an autonomous or independent curator. For me, the grounding of the programme in the local context is a much more interesting and productive way to work, and offers far richer results than those processes of the independent curator who always has to jump in to new situations and negotiate them working only with a fleeting understanding of the place. I rather prefer the slow process of getting to know a site and working with artists and audiences with each project, gaining new knowledge that can be built up over time that can inform future directions.

Aside from that, I do acknowledge that a lot of the programmes that I've done have been based on my independent research, and I have brought my own long-term interests into the programmes of these spaces, and I have, in a way, invited artists into an ongoing conversation, which I have established in each of these institutions. To briefly summarise what that is, at Cubitt I was interested in the history of Cubitt as an artist-run space, and I really tried to look at self-organised artistic practices. I set up the self-publishing fair there, 'Publish and be Damned', with Kit Hammonds, and that was also trying to look at ways in which artists are self-organising. In a way you could call that another form of autonomy, in the sense that artists who are taking an 'outside' position are not bringing what they do into institutions, but are realising things that they do through more collaborative informal networks. That was part of what we were trying to find out about in that project.

I am also interested in how smaller organisations can learn from different self-organised forms of activity and what kinds of relationships are possible. At CASCO a lot of what I was doing was commissioning artists, and there wasn't really a large audience for what we were doing and it didn't make sense just to do a programme that didn't have any grounding within the local context. Although I did invite some artists to come and realise different forms of research within the city. They spent quite a lot of time building up projects that

were based on research that connected to a lot of people who were there. We also involved a lot of students in our projects as researchers. We did quite an event-based programme.

I will just talk about one project, to give an example. At CASCO this project talks of autonomy. It was with Ricardo Basbaum, who is a Brazilian artist. He's been working with this particular shape for a really long time, about ten or fifteen years, and he uses it in different permutations. In this case, the project he did for documenta, which you might be familiar with, involved the circulation of this object, which is still travelling around the world. People are invited to use it in different ways, and then document what they do via his web site. So you can see here some of examples of these. Here is a concert in Argentina. In Utrecht we put the object, I mean the shape, on the map and it designated different sites for activity. In each case we researched each site, to find out what was there already, and whom we might work with in that particular place. We also involved a lot of artists from The Netherlands in collaborating on different projects. So, this is the map of what we did. This bit is in a playground where we worked with some local 'Slam' poets, we realised a game about the spreading of a fictional virus with artist Mieke Van de Voort, and we did a zombie walk with artists Iratxe Jaio and Klaas van Gorkum, who were actually doing a residency at the time in a part of the city that had been identified as lacking in social cohesion. So, these artists were brought in and were realising a zombie film, and we collaborated with them on this march.

This is a game that Ricardo realises, called, "Me and You Exercises and Games", which he played on one of the sites. In it you have people perform choreographies in groupings of 'you-s' and 'we-s', and we did some lectures. This was a radio play by Steve Rushton, which we broadcast on one of the streets. This was a talk about the public and the private spheres in the living room of a bed & breakfast place where we used to house a lot of the artists. One of the points fell on a street named after Rio de Janeiro, so we had a typical Brazilian Samba barbeque, and this image shows how it came in to the gallery space.

This is how Ricardo translates some of the things he does into these diagrams. They describe the different kind of relations at work and at play in the project. So, some of the things that he is interested in are group dynamics, trauma, and micro-perceptions. And so, although there are fun, game-like activities it also gets drawn back into a more conceptual realm.

So, in a way, one of the ways in which we worked at CASCO was to realise a lot of the projects outside of the space, very embedded in the city, and then to bring that back in to the space both by reflecting upon what we did, trying to bring in a theoretical aspect. So, this is how we used the space quite a lot of the time. The space is very small and has the office in it, and so we used it more as a site of reflection. I think, in a way, that is how my interest in autonomy and engagement is manifest in the space. The space was drawn where you can

draw back and reflect upon what has happened in the city in a very embedded and engaged way.

So, also to quickly say something about my approach at The Showroom, which in a way is a space that has a history of profiling individual artists with solo exhibitions. I am still very interested in the solo projects, working with artists on solo projects. To me they are often the most rewarding collaborations that I've had. But, at The Showroom, I am interested to bring in different forms of collectivity, as a way of building on this tradition of the solo artist, and thinking about what makes sense now. Also, in London there are a lot of spaces that are profiling artists in solo shows. I am keen to look at forms of collaboration and participation.

So, just to end on, many of the projects that I've worked on have tried to break down the autonomy of the artist, the curator, and the institution in favour of engagement. However, I would also acknowledge the uses of the autonomous space of art as a site of retreat and reflection. And, in this sense, I could say that I have often tried to find a position that is somewhere between autonomy and engagement as a way to work outside and within the art world and cross between those areas.

MP: Wonderful. Thank you very much Emily. And thank you to all three of you for your thoughtful reflections.

So to give you some time to gather your thoughts on each others presentations, I'd like to begin, if I may, by drawing out a couple of the points from the abstract that my students prepared for this panel.

Specifically, in our discussions preparing the material for this conference, we recognised an irony in the kind of names who have become well known figures both in the history and in the recent contemporary context of curating; these figures that have become what Marie-Anne has coined as the 'Euro-Curo'. These are characters like Walter Hopps, Harald Szeemann, Conrad Fischer, Seth Seiglaub, Lucy Lippard, obviously Hans Ulrich Obrist, Nicholas Bourriaud, Lars Bang Larsen, Maria Lind, etc., curators whose work collectively spans fifty or sixty years across that list, and whose work tried to, and did, succeed in being relational or engaged somehow, or pushing the conception of what autonomy or heteronomy might mean in art for artists, curators and curatorial practices. They are all engaged in these relational practices, and yet they are the 'names' we remember, they are the 'ones'. And there's a cruel irony in the historicising process, which I think still continues today. Maria Lind, Lars Bang Larsen, Nicholas Bourriaud, and Hans Ulrich, curators like this, are the punctuation points in an otherwise nebular undifferentiable relational field.

I think it's interesting that all of you relinquish the visibility of your authorship to the project, to the art work, to the engagement with whatever it is that you're

working on/with, and that these other characters don't. Their practices are based on that visibility.

And so it's that figure which you all touched on, which is obviously an ideological construct – the figure of the 'individual' curator clearly has an ideological import – and Marie-Anne you touched on that when you talked about financial and institutional forces that play on both the actual work that gets made and also the level or the power of the visibility of the relationship between nominally the author and the product, nominally the shows.

So, I wonder how you all feel about that sort of irony.

ED: In a way, I don't think it really matters very much. I mean, the role of the curator on the sort of list of names you mention are all people who, in a sense, had to make some sort of breakthrough in terms of organising culture and shaping it and trying to transmit to a very wide audience what it was about. I think the particular examples that you've given are quite good ones. So, if you take, for example, Nicholas Bourriaud, in a way he made a significant contribution. You may not agree with it. You may think it casts some work in a particular light. It may over-determine some things. It may have excluded vast areas of practice, blah, blah, blah. But, it is a very precise notion, and interestingly I also thought that when he curated the Triennial at Tate Britain he seemed to manage to work outside of the box that he'd put himself into as well. I thought it was probably the best Tate Triennial that has happened so far. So, in a way, I think that's just another job, and I think that we three here have been, in various ways, embarked on different versions. I don't know whether there's also some ... I don't think you can make it gender specific as to whether you also as a curator want to stand out in a way, as I think we can all think of plenty of female examples of more and more women being appointed to head up biennials. So, certainly for me, when you talk about the ideological construct of the super-curator I also think back on the ideological construct that all three of us are sharing. And I think it's really interesting to sit on this panel with people who are younger than me, because I tend to think that growing up in the 1970s and 80s that everything that I was inculcated to believe from public service has actually now been swept away. And clearly, hearing you two talk that's not the case. You share the same values of this in this way. When I started work, and certainly all the time that I was at the ICA, I never dreamt of authoring any of the leaflets that we wrote. I just felt that that would be me putting myself out there, self-promoting, and that was not my job. So, you were always making judgements, all the time, about how visible you as a curator should be, or ought to be. I then at the end of my career at the ICA, thought 'oh my god, I've really made a mistake here', 'there are all these people here who have dedicated their whole professional lives to promoting themselves as curators, as authors', and by that stage it's too late to change your style or whatever. But, certainly without realising it, and I think it's something to be proud of and it doesn't get talked about very much this whole idea of public service ... it's cer-

tainly something that the Tate tries to inculcate in its curators, and on some levels institutions like the Tate get criticised for being faceless and bureaucratic, but the other side of it is that you're lucky to be a public servant, you're lucky to be working in this sort of environment, the artists must speak, the publication, whatever, and it's not a vehicle for your own personal self-aggrandisement or wealth creation.

MAMQ: I'd just like to pick up on something that Emma has said around the idea of authoring through writing. I guess that changed through the trajectory of the independent curator. For example, Szeemann didn't write in the sense that now we have the idea of a writing practice from the like of Bourriaud, Maria Lind, Charles Esche. So I suppose they were defining themselves through what became a new curatorial discourse that they had defined, and they probably found that art historians and critics weren't doing that. So, they owned their own history, and that's one way of doing that. I encountered the Maria Lind and Charles Esche generation first. When I was at art school no-one really talked about curating, but I happened to end up as a facilitator for Superflex and for Stephen Willats and I think I learnt invisibility then.

(Laughter from audience).

I'm not bitter about it, it's good. There was a whole team of us making collaborations happen, and I'm always interested where people like grant Kester write about these very 'pure' relationships, and I'm always interested in that mode of mediation between ... and I guess the figure emerged; the curator with his or her peers, but then writing has made it so that we know who they are. But, the art world like names as well. The art world likes to identify its star-makers and curators, if they are associated with a movement, that will make their name.

EP: From my perspective, I guess, as I studied as an artist, and one of the reasons why I decided not to continue my art career was that I didn't like the focus on myself, and I was much more interested in other people. I really enjoy working with people, so I never feel like it's me that can take the credit. And quite often when I'm working in tiny organisations I tend to talk about 'we' all the time as if 'we're' a large organisation when quite often it is just me that's authoring the project. I also remember just after my interview at CASCO, one of the things they liked about my interview was that I didn't talk about 'I', 'I', 'I' all the time. I was talking about the organisation, and I think that's really, for me, important in explaining that I am always working in very specific contexts and organisations and it's not just about myself, although I bring my interests and knowledge into that.

It's interesting that your list is an all male list. There are a couple of women on there, but of course there are other examples of women in these roles.

MP: Oh sure: Rosa Martinez, Catherine David, Uta Meta Bauer, Chrissie Iles, ... loads. Perhaps we're redressing the balance here today too?

(Laughter from panel and audience)

EP: Someone like Maria Lind has worked very much in terms of steering organisations and institutions, so I think that she's someone who's managed to do both, and also Charles Esche as well. They have done what we're doing, and have created a very singular approach towards doing that.

MP: I think that's interesting, because I'd also like to ask you all about other kinds of models of working as a curator that could resist some of the pressures that you were all talking about, say, between these artificial poles of pure autonomy and a pure relational, engaged or heteronomous state.

I ask this because, as you were talking Emma, I was thinking that curatorial practice has been very slow to change and transform, much more so than art production for example, as you were saying Marie-Anne, but it currently seems to be caught between the devil and the deep blue sea in terms of trying to define a politics for itself, or trying to define a space where politics can be played out in a transformative way.

Now, this may be a bit antagonistic, but, I could say that, on the one hand, we have the institution and institutional curators who have to follow Liberal doctrine, if you like, from government. I mean they just have to, for the sake of their financial security. Then, on the other hand, we have the independent curator, if we're going to single out people who work in that way Like Nicholas Bourriaud and Hans Ulrich, who are a pure – well, not really pure, but for the sake of argument - a 'pure' Post-Fordist worker, and their reputation precedes them, and indeed their reputation is 'the work'. The production of 'them' as the 'figure' is 'the work', and everything else is supplementary to that in a very directly Post-Fordist kind of way. In this way, they are working all the time. The trope of the curator being the mediator, the connector, the 'plug-er-in-er', as it were, of joining people together is very much associated with those sorts of curators. And there isn't much to choose between those two positions really; between a Liberal and then a Neo-Liberal position. And so, it's quite heartening to hear you all particularly trying to almost sneak-in your authorship, or like you were saying Marie-Anne, some sort of irresponsibility like the 'real politik' of dealing with funding organisations. The sort of bureaucracy of funding is such a difficult assault-course to get through that one has to squeeze and bend the rules a little. But not just with funding; I think you have to squeeze and bend the rules in other ways, both to do what you want to do with your own powers, your own freedom, or your own ideas or whatever, but at the same time you have to respect the communities that you were talking about Emily, the constituencies, the artists, the work, and the institution that you work for. And it's a very

difficult balancing act, and I wonder if there are models that are different to this position between the devil and the deep blue sea that you admire from other groups, or collectives or individuals or institutions?

EP: My influences are often from artists actually. For example, the Copenhagen Free University, in which artists who I have worked quite closely with have influenced my thinking by their way of building up research in a quite collaborative collective way. Or, let's say, Raqs Media Collective is another example of this, or Surai, the space in Delhi where there's a really interesting intersection of different forms of artists' research which is taking place in parallel with each other that constructs a situation where people can come together and share different research that they are undertaking. The artists that I've worked with have been very influential for me in terms of programming or thinking around the programme and in terms of my own curatorial approach. I would see programming as a form of curating, as a build-up of something over time that then becomes recognised maybe a year later after it's happened, rather than the group-show or biennial approach where things happen at the same time. It's more of a slow building up of something over a period of time that's designed to achieve something only after a year or two.

ED: What I liked about the proposition in the abstract for today was the idea of the pole being complicated. I'd always thought in these polar terms, with the curator either being inside or outside of the institution. But to think about how you can be autonomous within the institution and how you could act as a sort of irritant within it is interesting. Certainly, I think a lot of the places that I've worked have had an establishment quality to them, and that's taken many different forms, and so I'd always wanted to try to dismantle the structure that I was in. But, I quite enjoyed, at the same time, playing with very classical forms within that. So, it's to do with almost working in some sort of masquerade type of way, if you like. For instance, at Stoke Museum doing something where you invite artists to work with the museum, but then at the ICA it was a fascinating place to work at because there was the combination of the physical structure of the building as a classical building and then the extremely left-leaning ideology of everyone who worked there, which to a large extent I was an instrumental part of. But, at the same time I wanted to kick dust in the face of that as well, because that seemed to be the ultimate sort of taboo. For me, doing an exhibition like the John Currin show that we did in the upper gallery, in 1996, was how I kicked against the prevailing taste and ideological beliefs of my fellow workers at the ICA. I did that very consciously. Also, the very classical nature of his paintings, I felt, also then, surprisingly, almost make it like a site-specific piece within the context. So, it was about history. It was about painting. It was about representation of female bodies. It was about masculinity. All of those things my fellow colleagues at the ICA dealt with on a daily basis. But I was just choosing to use a very different form to interrogate those things. So, I think it's

something that doesn't get talked about, but the richness and excitement you can get from undermining your own position, or using artists to ... and, yeah, then it goes back to thinking that if I'm using a very conventional medium like painting, that's probably something that I've dedicated myself to, is to try to entrap people in trying to think about and doing things differently, because you're using a medium that they are very comfortable with.

MAMQ: To pick up on what you were saying – the branded curator is Neo-Liberal, and the public sector curator is possibly Liberal – the public sector is also now Neo-Liberal. It's a mixed economy. I think you're right to identify those two poles, but they are getting closer together in certain ways. And I think also that the figure of the '24-hour curator' in the 1990s shifted the expectations of institutions too. So, it's problematic maybe to be a '24-hour cultural worker' in a public institution because you own less for yourself. I'm not sure what I walk away with sometimes when I walk away from institutions. So, I'd say it is more blurred, but hopefully one can fight the good fight from within.

MP: Great. Well, thank you all of you. Shall we open up to the audience now? Are you all happy to do that? So, do we have any questions for our panellists? Yes, there's one at the back there.

Pamela Kember: Thank you. Yes, hello. I am on the board of directors of the Asia Art Archive in Hong Kong. I'm very interested to hear about this dichotomy that you're talking about between the institutional curator and the independent curator. But, I'd like to bring in another agenda, which is the 'cosmopolitan curator': somebody who is literally crossing borders all the time. And they are invisible, only very often because we don't always hear about them. And I'm very curious that most of the speakers have used the 'we' regarding the key uber-curators you've been talking about. But, from my own perspective, I haven't heard anyone talk about Aei Wei Wei, Founmilou Ju Nando, Hou Hanru, Joan Key, Mathieu Copeland, Apinania Potienanda, Fay Da Wei, Wu Hong. These are all curators that I know and engage with, and I'm very curious to ask you, as people who are curating and teaching, are these invisible curators? Do they form part of your wider version of what is a curator today? Because I really feel this is quite important to analyse what is the syntax of what is a curator. Thank you.

MP: Thanks for the question. I hope you don't mind but I've just got permission to answer that first because I brought up the list of these types.

Just to say very simply, yes, absolutely. Those figures are very familiar to me, and I am sure to all of you as well. However, I don't think I could distinguish them as a specific type from the types of curators I listed. I think they would be

interchangeable. I don't think their work is politically or ideologically particularly different. But as you were saying they are from different continents.

PK: In terms of a critique of the Western curator I think these figures don't fall into the categories that you've been talking about today. And I was wondering if we could open it up a little bit.

MAMQ: I think it's probably unfortunate that we went through a Euro-centric list. I would see them as being free, or having a freedom to be invited, massively invited, all around the world to produce exhibitions, and they come with their own coterie of artists. So you know the curators by whom they are accompanied with. And I guess a lot of us are familiar with the Miwon Kwon text that talks about the 'frequent flier curator and artist', and that was a moment of defining what that meant. But I guess they are all global and that's a difference. It's not saying that everything is global, but that's how one would see them, because that's how they can be anywhere at any time and that's part of their power.

EP: I wouldn't differentiate between the list that you've mentioned and the one we've been talking about. I guess Matthew's list was a more historical list. But someone like Hou Hanru is equally a part of this international jet-set curator and he works collaboratively with a lot of the people that have been mentioned. They are all reference points for me as well. They're all people that I've followed.

ED: I think it's just the way that the discussion is structured, which is that it's focussed around polar opposites, so that suggests a Western European focus largely.

MP: If you don't mind, I wonder if I could turn the question back to you to ask what might differentiate those curators' practices, in your view, from any of the other very visible global trans-national curators that one could think of.

PK: I was just hoping to bring out the agenda of what we define as East or West, or Euro-centric curators. I am thinking could we expand the concept really, not just to the names of the people I mentioned, but to include the notion of the 'cosmopolitan'? We're all cosmopolitan even if we stay in one place. We think in a cosmopolitan way, internationally, we talk about trans-nationalism, as at Chelsea we have a Centre for Trans-national Studies and Identity, and yet we are still located here. So I was just asking: is that an interest for the group and for the other people around this, to discuss the idea of the curator as somebody who is not fixed in any one point?

MAMQ: It is an interesting point to identify what is at stake in trans-nationality, and I think it did become an object of ennui with biennials that seemed generic, so that everything moved around the world at the same time and at the same pace. I guess that there has maybe been more of an interest in specificities, localities – there was a lot of very glib 'oh, it's all local and global' kind of stuff going on at one point with biennials, which was never very convincing.

MP: 'Glocal'.

MAMQ: Yeah, 'Glocal', that was a horrible neologism. So, I think you are right to raise the point, and I guess these more intimate projects – or the recognition that it's more complex than just moving names around the world is important.

MP: I think the significant question to ask is to what degree do these trans-national figures, or indeed any trans-national collectives, differ from trans-national corporate global titan companies. My worry is that they are based on the same Neo-Liberal political model. Although they may not be Post-Fordist Capitalist, they reproduce the same and have the same ideology, which allows for global, globalised, and globalisable capital exchange and domination. And I worry that trans-national art activity doesn't provide a significantly different ideological or political model that can effectively critique any of the things that are currently problematic with art's interface with governmental culture or business, which are the dominant heteronomous forces that impact upon it.

Pierre: Hello, my name is Pierre. I am from The Netherlands. About ten years ago the Gate Foundation closed down, because at that particular moment we were not globalised enough. And that was such a big loss. Luckily enough part of the archive was sent to the Van Abbe Museum, where Charles Esche made it into an unbelievably useful resource. But, I cannot run away from her question because I work with two completely different sides of the world. I work with Central Asia, which is a booming area of the planet that people in the West know very little about, and I work in Brazil, which is a new economy that is booming as well. But, it is true that if you are an invisible curator, you don't get the job. You are not invited for talks, you are not considered. So, it is a very solitary practice. You can write about things, but you won't get published. So, I truly appreciate the generosity and respect that you three share for the practice, but you are, from my point of view, in a comfortable zone, which means you are visible, even if you choose not to believe you are. So, what are we going to do when we are doing, even when we come from Western countries, our choice is to operate in the peripheral zone?

EP: I don't think any of the people mentioned before are at all invisible, because I knew most of the names that were mentioned. But, I think you are right that there are a lot of people working on the peripheries. Sometimes that's a

choice, and sometimes people are really struggling to get visibility for what they are doing. There's also this tendency now for let's say ... I mean, I went on an organised research visit to India, and it felt like we were following the trail of, in the footsteps of, every other institutional curator in the world who had been to visit exactly the same people as we had. There are certain gatekeepers to those regions as well, where if a group of curators are visiting India or another country like China, or the middle-east maybe, there are the same contacts that are being made, and people go for very short periods of time and don't really have the chance to look for the people who are actually much more 'on the ground' there and not doing this international jet-setting. I think that is a problem, that there is a very fast pace and things are being researched not very well. So, there's a kind of tokenism that starts to happen as well and the same people travel around the world as well to be part of these group exhibitions that claim to be representative of a particular place. I think that is a problem, and it's not really the way that I like to work, which is why I have much more grounded myself within the particular context that I'm working in. Although, I am of course always interested to see what's happening in other places.

I was thinking that there is a real explosion of biennials in Asia, but there's also a lot of ... I mean, when I went to Korea a few years ago and there's really interesting self-organised organisations like ArtPool, which I visited, and other things like that where they're not really getting a profile. But, in a way, maybe if they were suddenly thrust in to the limelight they would lose some of the concentration that they have in their local context and the research that they are doing locally, and they would lose the connection to where they work.

MP: There might be a flip side to this question of visibility. I think we have become accustomed, in the same way that companies, particularly companies that need investment, have become accustomed to using growth vectors as the measure of success. So, companies have to be constantly growing. There's no point of adequate operation. You are either growing or you're declining. And there's no sense that you reach a plateau and that's fine and you stick to that. Companies have this and the whole capitalist system works on this exponential graph; it has to, which is huge problem. And I think that's same with the question of visibility within the art world, which is equated as power and success and quality and all these other measure. There's a sort of mismatch, which has somehow been forced together, of quantitative measure that has been transformed magically into the qualitative measure of art, which I think is also a big problem. And so, for curators I think, in some ways, actually too much visibility can, and this sounds counter-intuitive, be detrimental. I've recently been in email correspondence with Roger M. Buergel, and he feels that after his documenta, which many people feel was unjustly badly received in the art press especially after the glowing praise of Okwui Enwezor's documenta edition before, and because of the visibility that being director of documenta creates, he can't do the kind of stuff that he wants to, which would be much

more self-orientated, much more self-invested in his writing and his thinking. And this is because of the pressure of having to be 'an institution', as such. So there can be a negative quality to visibility as well; a kind of millstone.

Galia Kollektiv: There were a lot of really interesting points in that discussion, but to pick on just one: the terms 'collaboration' and 'collaborative' keep coming up as being very positive, as some kind of alternative to a notion of autonomy or authorship, or even something like curatorial subjectivity. And, I was just wondering whether it was inherently a good thing, 'collaboration'. The term came to mind in connection with things like 'MGM in association with Sony', 'the Royal Academy in collaboration with Glaxo Smith Kline', etc. Is this a good thing necessarily, or is it just another form of branding? So, rather than have the artist as an author or the curator as an author, you have the artists' collaborative group as the author, and the curatorial team as the author, but does that really make a difference?

EP: There are different forms of collaboration, so I don't think you can put them under the same bracket; i.e. the corporate collaboration and other kinds of collaboration that are taking place between artists and/or curators.

ED: I remember a sponsor who specifically wanted their involvement with an exhibition described as a 'collaboration', because it made them look more creative. They didn't want to simply look like an organisation that just gave us money to do a project with. They were wanting to collaborate with the organisation I was working with at the time, and to put a good gloss on it you could say that – the project was one that was meant to be interrogating work and politics – and this was a kind of think-tank body that was kind of involved in that area – but at the same time, it was a money-making organisation – and quite frankly they didn't really collaborate with us. We just had an awful lot of long meetings with them. But it is interesting that this term is considered by necessity to be a good thing. And it is a way for sponsors to make it look like they have had more involvement artistically in a project than they actually have.

MAMQ: I think it is a good point to bring up, because we can end up simply stating that autonomy is bad and collaboration good, which is an over-simplification of the dichotomy. Institutions are very good at absorbing the new and emerging and things that refresh them, and that is in the institution's interest. So, you appear more open, self-reflexive, flexible, all of those things, if you collaborate. However, when it is sincerely done it hopefully stands in for merging two fields of research or bringing something in that you don't have. But, yes, I guess it can be done just to 'be doing the right thing' sometimes.

EP: I would say that a collaborative process is a more difficult way to work, in

a sense, because it takes a lot longer for example. I am currently working on a European collaboration with CASCO, and Objective Exhibitions in Antwerp, which is a collaboration on an institutional level that seems to need endless discussions and referrals of decision. It's a much much harder way to work, but interesting things can come out of it in the way that if you pool together different people's knowledge and resources there's more potential for something more transformative to happen, or more opportunities. I am interested in a conversational kind of model of practice as well, whereby through some kind of conversation you open up the potential of something through more than one person being involved, more than one mind, let's say.

ED: When I was at the ICA, I have to confess, I was quite un-collaborative with my fellow colleagues, because working in an arts centre with many different media represented there was – and again, this is all part of a kind of liberal project where all the arts would be connected and cross-pollinate each other, that you would go to see a film and then automatically you'd want to consume an exhibition, and vice versa – and this is a very problematic model. It doesn't really work in practice. I found that the most difficult aspects of programming there were when the organisation demanded of us that we work collaboratively, because to my mind it just meant that I lost all focus, all urgency in terms of the visual arts practice that I was really closely involved in and passionate about. It forced me to programme something that I actually didn't want to programme, which is going counter to everything that I believed in. It only happened once or twice, so for the 10 years that I was there, I always fought against it tooth and nail. It's partly because different art forms do not evolve or share situations over a short period of time. Over a longer period of time they might do, and that might be an interesting project, to pull things out and to curate things retrospectively. At the time, I must admit, that I found that very painful.

MP: I guess there has to be an internal logic for those cross-pollinations to happen, or else it's an artificial 'fit'.

Billie Rae Vinson: I was going to ask a similar question about collaboration and institutional structures and the way that they cope with those things. We just came back from a trip to Berlin, where we visited NGBK. It has an experimental institutional structure based on collaboration and interdisciplinary attitude to work that Marie-Anne was talking about; like having lawyers, and scientists, and politicians, and arts and curators all working in the same space. They have to work collaboratively in that they engage with the entire programme, and NGBK is lucky enough to have a funder, via the lottery, that doesn't mess around with that too much. So, I just wondered what you thought, within this idea of intellectual autonomy, and the curator's ability to do that, and within the institutions that you guys work in here, compared to other for-

mats of institutional structures, is there possibly a potential for new things, new ways of collaborating?

MAMQ: I guess that picks up what Emma was saying about the ICA. Also, the problem of 'collaboration good', 'collaboration bad', 'interdisciplinary good', 'interdisciplinary bad' - interdisciplinarity isn't great when you are forced to lose your specialism. I don't happen to work for an institution that will ever lose their staff because there aren't enough of us, but if I did there is a pressure now for institutions to programme generically almost, and make everything cross over, because that's what the public wants, or they are told that's what they want. So, you have this problem of specialism being lost. At the same time, interdisciplinarity on its own terms, or on your terms, is productive – I guess it's also worth considering that it's encouraged in universities because it increases outcomes. Now I don't work in one, but I am very aware that there is a pressure to be interdisciplinary now because it enhances your research outcomes. It's a kind of mixed blessing – it's not the same thing, in the same way that collaboration isn't just a word, it is quite nuanced. It's both very Neo-liberal and then possibly also tries to evade that.

EP: I don't know the model at NGBK that well, but I do know that sometimes the programme there suffers from that, in that it feels quite fragmented and disjointed. They have an open submission strand of it, and I think it suffers from not having a very clear identity in the end. You can't recognise it as standing for something. But I do think it is an interesting model that you bring up. I think sometimes institutions need leadership or a clear identity.

BRV: It's actually based on submissions and then they have a system of voting amongst the members.

EP: My experience of it, having gone there over many years, is that I can never be sure about what I'm going to see there. Sometimes I see good things and sometimes not. In principle it sounds like a really interesting structure, but the reality of it is that it can easily get lost if it's too fragmented.

MP: I think that the opposite to that would be, if you don't mind me saying so Emma, the commercial gallery. And I find it fascinating that you say that you feel you have more freedom there, in Timothy Taylor Gallery, to realise the nuanced and subtle and ambitious projects like the "Ballet Mechanique" show, than you had when you were in public institutions.

ED: Yes.

MP: I suppose what I'm getting at is that another of the false dichotomies that gets proposed is that the public space is good and private spaces are bad somehow, because they're making money.

ED: Well, you don't make money on shows like that. Although, in a way, in some sense programming a commercial gallery is quite similar to programming another type of space, in that you have a sort of mixed economy. You have shows that are more risky, which are going to cost a lot of money, and then you have to balance out your programme with other shows that are, let's say, better funded, whether that's going to be through sales or whether it's because it's your star artist of the year and you know that you can get sponsorship for it and it pays for everything else. Every programme that I have ever worked on has followed that model, I'm afraid. That's the same here at Tate. You have your blockbuster and it pays for your small display that is very art historically cogent, but appeals to a very small audience.

MP: We've got time for one further quick question.

Lucia Farinati: It's just more a comment really, to bring to attention an event of last week. Tate Modern last week celebrated its tenth anniversary with its "No Soul For Sale" fair, a festival for independents. And actually it was not just an invitation for independent spaces to show, but a curated project. So we're going back to the uber-curator again. On this occasion there was a collective called Making a Living that actually started an enquiry. They wrote a letter to Tate asking for information about how the event was organised, because the event was based on the idea of reciprocity. Tate was actually the hosting venue, but none of the independent spaces invited were given a budget to show their stand and their artists. So, I think this presents a quite paradoxical situation when talking about the institutional and the autonomous curator. I think this is an extremely interesting example in which many aspects or layers that we've been discussing exist. So, in the leaflet by the Making a Living collective, that I picked up, there is this sentence that says, "reciprocal generosity is the lifeblood of independent art communities throughout the world. This spirit, however, is not the property of any institution, artist or curator". So, I think this issue of reciprocity is very crucial.

MP: Really, and they deny that sentiment being present in institutions, they think it's just the independent communities that have this reciprocity of generosity? Yes, right. That's what they wrote. Gosh, that's insulting to you guys, as you work in institutions and dependent communities!

(Laughter across the audience and the panel)

I think we have to stop it there, as we're already a little beyond the time we have been allotted.

Thank you for all for your questions, and now please join me in thanking our three invited speakers this morning.

[This transcription has been produced with the editorial decision to represent as closely as possible the intonation, pace and character of the dialogue, resulting in some broken sentences and other syntactical irregularities.]



Panel 2

Mediation as Production

Collaboration, Authorship and Contingency

MA Contemporary Fine Art (Curating)

Sheffield Hallam University



Neil Webb & Ron Wright

**Sound Threshold
Daniela Cascella & Lucia Farinati**

Simon Hollington & Kypros Kyprianou

Richard Birkett





What kind of experience have you all had in terms of how people react to the term curator versus artist? There are ideological attachments to these titles. How do you understand these in your practice, and how do you use them to your advantage, if you do at all?

Neil Webb

Some artists will see curators as holding the power as they will be the ones that ultimately chose whether they want to show their work. Some artists are suspicious of curators and consider that artists are the ones with the work and the ideas.

On the other side of the coin, when I have curated projects I have found myself strangely popular. So, read into that what you will.

These are quite general sweeping remarks, in my experience I would suggest that artists want their work shown so will initially court curators. Others prefer to observe in the shade. The artist/curator relationship can be very fruitful. Like all things, you need to do your research.

Some artists will be of interest to some curators and vice versa.

Ron Wright

I've had various experiences of curatorship. Some have been almost invisible and that has often worked well, as there has been a trust in the project. When I first started collaborating on audio-visual work as a sound artist there seemed to be difficulty in acknowledging my contribution in terms of recognizing the role or importance of sound in the project. However, I have also had very positive experiences with some curators and these tend to be those who were former artists or still practice. I'm often uncomfortable with the deference that often needs to be shown and, coming from a background of independent film, I'm probably naive to the tacit rules of those roles. Now, I think I just

What problems do you find with collaborative practice compared to your individual practices?

Neil Webb

I don't believe there should be too much of a problem if you enter a collaboration with an open mind and the sense of the word 'collaboration' is maintained in the partnership. There is a lot to be gained in a fruitful collaboration: exchange of ideas, methods and ideology. The only problems generally arise when an initial collaboration is tabled but then changes direction towards the facilitation and execution of someone else's work. In this instance, which I have experienced, the project is no longer a collaboration and is being overseen ultimately by a single person. This is not an ideal situation and brings up questions of whether you want to be credited for a piece of work or ultimately if you simply accept it as a paid job.

Ron Wright

Film is generally a collaborative medium, so I'm used to all the permutations of a working dynamic including the Herzog/Kinski approach - though I try to avoid that one for health reasons! The main factor is feeling that creative input is allowed and respected on all sides. In some ways, collaboration is easier as it is supportive.

Do you prefer to curate yourself or be curated?

Neil Webb

My first motivation is always to make a piece of work, so I would rather be curated than curate in the first instance. Luckily, I have nearly always had existing work selected by a curator or been given a free hand to create a new piece.

Ron Wright

Although I think both can offer huge creative challenges and possibilities I would always prefer to be curated, as I prefer to make work and often like to work intuitively preferably without too much interference. I think its very important to establish a working relationship between artist and curator from the start.

If you believe in mediation as production and its immediate corollary production as mediation, do you therefore follow Deleuze's view that all being is mediation and that there is a material panpsychism? Is this a problematic challenge to human agency in the processes of change, transformation and self determination, or should we be more fatalistic?

Ron Wright

Just think before you put the lotion in the basket. Or if you're going to play ball, play low.

Could you please reflect upon your experiences of being involved in the mediating process of creating what we called a 'multi-authored event', and expand a little upon how you feel or felt about the absence of a clear authored position.

Ron Wright

From our own perspective, the intention was to present a decentralised experience for the audience. It was an experiment with regard to the context of the event. So, once we had decided on the form and approach it became easier. I think we've both learned a lot from this experience. Hopefully, everyone has.





A lecture by Sound Threshold for the *Contingency of Curation* conference

Lucia Farinati:
During our presentation at the conference we showed an extract from the video documentation of a concert that Sound Threshold organised in 2008 as part of the project Music and Sound Through the Landscape. The project took place on Monte Bondone, in the region of Trentino in Northern Italy, and was a parallel event to Manifesta 7. The concert featured the Irish group Fovea Hex and was the inaugural event of Sound Threshold, a research project that we established in 2007 to investigate the relationship between sound and site.

Before starting to talk specifically about this project, I would like to address some of the topics of this panel, in particular the notion of mediation as production. I will do this by referring to the footage we showed at the conference. The video material had not been edited: it is actually taken from the original footage shot by a camera operator who was asked to document the whole concert.

The location we chose was an astronomic observatory at an altitude of 1600 metres. What you don't actually see from the documentation is the spectacular mountain landscape that characterises the topography of the Trentino and that was the point of departure of our research. To some extent my interest in beginning the presentation with the screening of this footage, lies in the possibility or in the attempt of re-articulating and re-thinking the process of documentation as a process of mediation between site and non-site, and eventually as a form of production in itself.

Moreover, while the film gives an idea of the physical context or the landscape in which Sound Threshold operated, it functions also as a mirror image that highlights the situation in which we find ourselves today: a staged presentation of some kind that will be documented and possibly featured on the Tate media archive, yet a staged presentation which is already, at the moment of speaking, a re-presentation and a documentation in itself. In looking at the stage from the point of view of the audience there is a sense of tension and expectation amplified by the music, but from the position of speaker, a certain uneasiness appears.

Although the panel had been proposed as a 'multi-authorial curatorial event', and the auditorium as a hosting venue of this event, the institutional space that we are occupying and its mediatic power, seem inevitably to nullify any kind of operation, or counter-discourse that aim at disrupting the conventional format of a conference and the rhetoric that it carries within it. For this reason I would like to propose to change the title of this panel from mediation as production to documentation as production. And here I would refer to the essay *Art in the Age of Biopolitics, From Artworks towards Art Documentation* by Boris Groys. Based on these observations the questions are: In which terms is it possible to think about documentation as production? It is a new open terrain, a conflictual arena or simply the place where the contingency of curation manifests itself? I am still thinking about the unedited piece of documentation, and having serious problems in imagining how this footage could become something unique. Yet it is the documentation of an art project, it is potentially art documentation.

Sound Threshold Daniela Cascella & Lucia Farinati

What we had actually experienced with our concert was neither the role of music promoter or the music producer, but to investigate a different mode of production, distribution and reception of sound, both outside the music industry and the gallery/museum context. The expanded field - or as suggested by this conference - the expanded practice which we inhabited, saw the collaboration between us as curators and the musicians responding to this specific site, and it is from this point that we started to develop Sound Threshold.

Daniela Cascella:

To refer to another aspect of this panel, I would reflect on the etymology of the word 'contingency'. It comes from Latin, cum + tangere. Where cum is 'with', and tangere is 'to touch', but also 'to reach'. 'To reach with', 'to reach together' - and also, 'to happen', 'to take place'. Hence the Italian adjective 'contiguo': 'close to', sharing a border. It strikes me how a simple etymological research opens up to a number of 'contingencies' that match the title of this symposium with the very nature of our research. The word in itself, contingency, carries within notions of taking place - being host in a place, and place as site - notions of proximity and sharing a border - which is the very nature of our project, called Sound Threshold - and notions of making happen - which in turn imply production, an activity our project has been very much dealing with.

I would argue that my entire curatorial activity has been an ongoing contingency, brought about by writing on sound. At the time I met Lucia, many questions were in my head about curating sound. To be able to engage in a dialogue about the site of sound, and sound across a landscape, was a way of curating sound in a more complex and lively context, and the initial step for the development of our research. In particular, Sound Threshold was born as an investigation of the specific landscape of the Trentino region in Northern Italy. The main questions that prompted such a project looked for ways to go beyond the picture postcard effect within that landscape, and reveal a more vivid sense in it: going beyond conventional systems of representation, and combining modes of looking at with those of looking through. Sound is the media through which we chose to confront such issues. Because it is elusive, and because we felt it could adapt to a variety of contexts, and to non-conventional modes of presentation. We referred to an essay published in 1973 by Vilém Flusser, *Line And Surface*, in which sound was identified as an element capable of destabilising the dynamics of screen/surface.

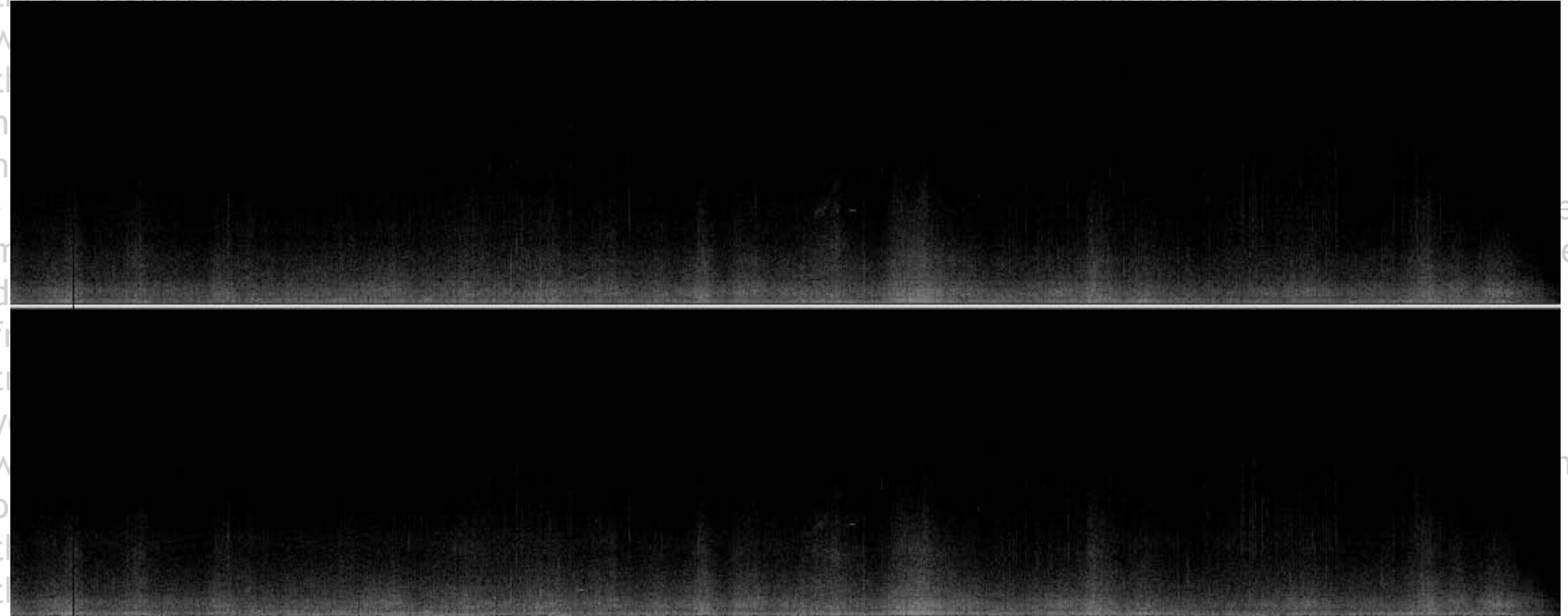
Sound Threshold Daniela Cascella & Lucia Farinati

We chose sound as an element that tears through images and simultaneously re-constitutes them, not simply passing through, but stopping and absorbing. We have investigated the idea of threshold as an extended metaphor of boundary, frontier, track, border and difference as embodied by the Latin word 'limes' by doing so, we have embraced an idea of landscape not only as a visual construct but also as a complexity of natural elements, literary references and acoustic phenomena. The project took shape through practice. The core of it was Cima Verde: the outcome of the collaboration between Sound Threshold, sound recorder Chris Watson, the team of the Centre for Alpine Ecology of Monte Bondone, and Paneveggio Park. We invited Chris to spend two weeks in a residency on the alpine site, during which he explored the acoustic phenomena of the area and captured them in a series of field recordings, which then resulted in the Cima Verde CD. Again, it has to be underlined how the CD is not as such a documentation, but reflects the very essence of our research: Chris's recordings, the scientists inputs on the ecosystem, our own writings in the booklet. What we ultimately learnt from this experience was a crucial challenge for us as curators: we shifted from a mode of production and distribution that increasingly calls for objects to be displayed or events to be documented, to a more impalpable process which created and asked, most of all, for a shared, and yet intimate, space for listening. The ways in which this space for listening might be critically recollected, and how it distances itself from traditional formats of exhibition-making are what we intend to investigate in the next season of Sound Threshold. To explore listening as a practice and to develop a discourse about site-specificity as challenged by time-based media. The site that we wish to re-visit is the ever-changeable site between the work and the listener, defined by and through time: a travelogue, a recollection, a constellation.



When Ron approached the piece today it came out of this hybrid of what we have been asked to do, these in between place. It came from a text which we interrupted, intervened with and transferred that into something else. I think these slightly vague in-between areas is what

Yeah. Familiar with how Host Artists Groups functions and how those collaborations actually come about and are enacted and made public, if you like? Yeah, I mean, they're nearly always selected invite artists that come to produce a piece of work responding to a brief, and the



host and the artist. In one sense this notion of a parasite perhaps, someone who i separated out, and I think that's a really interesting position, that you can have - you know, that sense of collaboration isn't always so clearly defined

people would make work that they wouldn't necessarily make as part of their own individual practise, so they can feel that they can take advantage of that and make a risky piece of work for them, which I think in a way is good because



What kind of experience have you all had in terms of how people react to the term curator versus artist? There are ideological attachments to these titles. How do you all understand these in your practice, and how do you use them to your advantage, if you do at all?

Simon:

The thing about titles, jobs etc, where I grew up (working class, North London) people you'd meet never asked what you did, it was considered a little un-seemly, and a little rude. When you met someone there would be banter until personal information was offered or slipped out. This could take weeks.

It was only after I left home and went to art school that I entered the middle class culture of giving you the third degree on the first meeting. Maybe this is why I don't really attach an ideological tag to being an artist. I don't particularly like the term.

In an article, someone once referred to Kyp and me as 'Conceptual artists' -I wrote back and said something like I'm not sure that we were, and that 'Half the time I think I'm just a song and dance man'. The writer (Mr. Sawyer) acutely replied 'So what are you the other half the time? Well at the moment I'm a painter and decorator. In a couple of months I'll go back to teaching, and during that time there will be days in which Kyp and I will sit at my kitchen table talking about our next project.

What problems do you find with collaborative practice compared to your individual practices?

Kyp:

Some practical things include the fact that Simon's not good on stepladders. Simon, you've missed a bit over there haven't you?

Simon:

No I have not missed a bit. The clients want it 'rustic'.

Despite giving half my fee to Kyp, I don't have any problems with collaborative practice, I'm amazed more people don't try it.

One reviewer did refer to us once as 'Sooty and Sweep'. I don't know which one is which - but there is something in there about a nonsense language. We can spend years working out a project, and with that comes an innate understanding of the idea - also backed up shared slang and cultural references that we forget that people may not get. And so when you explain them to people they are often bemused. It's like we have developed a Hollington and Kyprianou argot, and we forget that sometimes - and it's not the argot of the art world.

Do you prefer to curate yourself or be curated?

Kyp:

When a curator gets in touch and asks if we'd like to do a paid residency at a once top secret military establishment, then I prefer to be curated. Actually, the exhibition that came out of the residency that the curator invited us to do involved us curating long forgotten objects from an archive run by volunteer curators, so a bit complicated to split down into an either/or answer.

Simon:

Well, we are curated in the sense that someone gives us some money, and a space and we make something suitable. Recently, the only group shows we have been in are film screenings/tours, and I don't see that as the same as object/ space type work. A full reason why would take too long to say - but luckily we have worked with some very good curators who just allow us to do what we do with little interference. And sometimes they even bring us a cup of tea when installing, which is nice. It's a bit like being a painter and decorator.

If you believe in mediation as production and its immediate corollary production as mediation, do you therefore follow Deleuze's view that all being is mediation and that there is a material panpsychism? Is this a problematic challenge to human agency in the processes of change, transformation and self determination, or should we be more fatalistic?

Kyp:

Is there free will in matter? You've missed a bit haven't you?

Simon:

Could you please reflect upon your experiences of being involved in the mediating process of creating what we called a 'multi-authored event', and expand a little upon how you feel or felt about the absence of a clear authored position.

Kyp:

We weren't at the third session of the symposium, but a man came out earlier than everyone else, happy to have authored his own exit.

Simon:

I think many things are multi-authored, more than we imagine. A riot is a great example (was it Emma Goldman that said 'Society gets all the criminals it deserves') - as well as more prosaic events like a trip to the shops. So I applaud all of your attempts at replicating this. However, it was at Tate Britain (I won't mention BP) to the usual crowd, and conforming to our known language/concept structures that made it feel like it was authored by a mechanism bigger than the sum of its parts.

confidence, we can help each other.

think with us it's nice to have that

I was in a consultation meeting a couple of weeks ago about a regeneration project. The organisers thought it would be good to have the meeting at the local pub in the middle of the regeneration area. That's fine, but they (for practical and ideological reasons) booked the upstairs private hire room, and so us usual suspects turn up and talk, argue and posit personal agendas while the locals who will be the most affected by the art/regeneration axis of evil were downstairs having a beer and watching the football on the television.

Of course the local population will be consulted in due course, but it felt very same as, same as. I'm not sure where I'm going with this, other than maybe the answer to the Deleuze question is wrong. The answer is not no, but yes. Or somewhere in between.



where my own practise lies mostly for Lucia, it had to do with expanding into sound, it more open, and say that is well, it's ent been interest e, and for m on the site is we met I th ween territo he Centre of d producing orative proje many lines.

Richard Birkett

In the synopsis for this part of today's conference, the last hour or so has been described as a 'multi-authored curatorial event'. This strikes me as a very charged description – immediately it raises interesting questions; what is a curatorial event? What is it that has happened in the last hour that makes it a curatorial event, whereas what surrounds it is a conference?

There is something interesting here about the provision of this structure by the initiators of the session, and the brief they have provided to the speakers to move beyond the parameters of conventional academic presentations. It feeds back into the idea of mediation as production, and really feeds back into our interest in a role that sits between those of artist and curator. It begs the question also, within a contemporary expanded cultural field, what necessity is there to define and fix those roles?

Now, I wanted to really consider this position – that perhaps could be described as one of in-betweenness – and the elasticity it has afforded us during this session.

Richard Birkett

Perhaps what we have been asked to do over the last hour is to forget the need to qualify whether we're experiencing an artwork, some form of documentation of an artwork, some form of performance, some form of curatorial position or method, or some form of academic position.

Before opening up into a discussion with the participants I wanted to relate this sense of in-betweenness to a text that I have found quite helpful and that has opened up a few ideas for me recently. The text is by sociologist John Law, and is titled *After Method: Mess in Social Science Research*. It focuses on social science as a discipline, but more broadly what is interesting to take away from this text – through my rather crude understanding of it – is the disarmingly simple notion of appreciating that every time we look at 'reality', just by the process of looking and considering things, we're actually constructing those realities, rather than them just being 'out there'. The supposed certainties that we use, our established methods of practice, should be considered as unstable and in formation, rather than fixed points from which to distantly observe.

Richard Birkett

John Law takes the very interesting example of a laboratory, in which scientists may use with great confidence a certain piece of apparatus to enable them to run tests and achieve answers through repeated testing; but obviously there is an extent to which that apparatus itself is constructed around a series of 'answers', a series of points, a kind of coagulation of conclusions over a period of time. His idea is to flip that on its head somewhat, and to ask at what point those realities are being formed through the methods we undertake.

With this in mind it's interesting to consider that when looking at an expanded field of artistic practise, the supposed certainties that we operate under, that we operate through – our established methods of practise, whether they be curatorial or artistic – should somehow be considered unstable rather than fixed points.

I think this is very useful in relation to a notion of mediation as practise and a need to blur the positions of artist and curator, and to even blur positions beyond those disciplines towards other disciplines.

Richard Birkett

In the words of John Law, there is a challenge, perhaps, that "we will need to think hard about our relations with whatever it is we know, and ask how far the process of knowing it also brings it into being". This notion is suggestive of assuming an unfixated position, of being continually reconstituted by the input of other people, by the instability of relations that intersect within both the production and reception of art.

The potential that is outlined here suggests the avoidance of the closure that might be associated with a singular position, a singular perspective on the world. So that's one way perhaps to open up into this discussion a bit more; when it comes down to these two binaries, these two positions of artist and curator, does a sense of a tertiary, mediative position suggest that the roles of artist and curator don't offer enough scope? That in the fixedness associated with these positions we're lacking something?

I guess I just wonder if there were any responses to that. Thanks. It depends very much on the context. Within my presentation, I was actually proposing to turn the term mediation into context. I find it easy - I'm using "mediation" and so it depends very much on the context, and so in a collaborative practise, it's - let's say, one, you collaborate with somebody else. That is a kind of - from a negotiation, always, I think, is inclusive in the dialogue, but yes, thinking - I don't - personally, I'm not - I'm not an artist or I don't produce my own work, so I don't know what mediation means, you know, to my own work, so if that is a term that's applied



to an individual practise, in terms of what you want to do and what you do, I don't really know, so... I wonder whether that's about - that notion of being able to choose whether you're mediating or not or there's moment at which you're not mediating - is actually more about the context in which you're being asked to frame the mediating you're doing and how that is performed in some way. You know, I think that's largely what some of these presentations have been about in performing different forms of mediation in the same way that this text on the screen is performing it. So you know, and that does relate to really interesting ideas, you know? It presents interesting notions of that authorship again by performing mediation, do we try and assume roles as authors and creators in ways that maybe aren't so natural? I don't know. But I think we have possibly run out of time now, unless there is any - there is one - can we take - no, can't take anymore questions. Very sorry. Thank you very much indeed. APPLAUSE Thank you. Thank you.

MA Contemporary Fine Art (Curating)
Mark Batty, Jade Downes, Lou Hazelwood, Jim Howieson, Sarah Lovell, Deborah Pullan

Panel 3

Curating Friction

Between complicity and contingency

MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice

Chelsea College of Art and Design



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MA Critical Writing and Curatorial Practice

Robert Cliff — Emily Gee — Daeun Jeong — Thomas Ulrik Madsen
Francesca Marti — Nada Raza — Billie Rae Vinson

Curating Friction: Between Complicity and Contingency

Organised by students from MA Critical Writing and Curatorial
Practice at the conference The Contingency Of Curation,
Tate Britain, May 2010.

Foreword MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice

The historical construction of the curatorial is one of the archivist or manager, working inside the institution and safeguarding its collections. Although, in our more recent history the work of the curator has been seen and understood to be increasingly similar to that of the artist. This similarity also means that the curator has inherited the claims of artistic critique that have aspired both to produce critical knowledge and to work outside the system as a destabilising force.

However, it is much more common today for the curator to be working within and alongside these same systems of power, responding to the contingencies which impact the role. Cultural projects are playing an increasingly important role within urban regeneration programmes and the curator, bearing the cachet of producing a mix of cultural capital and creative critique, is a desirable agent for the proliferation of culture and economic wealth.

Complicit within these systems, can the curator still be radical? Can critical friction exist within these curatorial practices? Where is the curator positioned within this tension between complicity and contingency?

We can address, and distinguish between, the act of curation in the social realm; or what is commonly termed 'socially engaged practice', and the curation of the social realm; a process which utilises a curatorial methodology and which is performed by the figures of the architect, the urban planner, the policy maker, but also, increasingly the artist and the curator. We take this latter definition up understanding that this curation of the social also includes a curation with the social, since its aim is now more often the task of working alongside interest groups, work with communities, and also to involve themselves within the situations of the locality in which they work.

This discussion invited speakers, Roman Vasseur and Munira Mirza, with Andrea Phillips acting as mediator, to look to the future of curatorial practice within this context. Is there the potential for the curatorial to resist its apparent complicity with organisational power structures? How is it possible to understand curatorial practice as radical, and as capable of change in these circumstances?

Introduction to the panel 'Curating Friction: Between Complicity and Contingency' Dr. Andrea Phillips

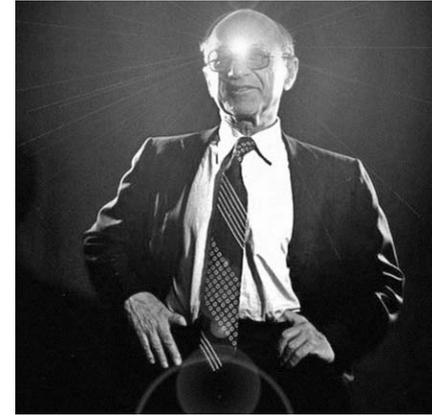
I'd like to thank the Chelsea students for inviting us to participate in this conference, and also, all the students that have been involved today in this very provocative and interesting discussion. Thanks for all your hard work organising the event.

Lets take the gloves off here. When it comes to talking about art in relationship to urban regeneration, we're talking, not about the potential for creating risky, fragile and precarious circumstances within our own milieus (the dominant terms thus far in the day's discussion of curating), but about real people and real lives. Many people in the audience, I'm sure, are professionals who have been involved in or are in the process of developing projects that occur in what is euphemistically called 'the public realm'. Those of you will be very aware of situations in which the conceits of precarity that we harbour intellectually, conceptually within our own formats and formulas come uncomfortably close to the precariousness of life. When we lobby for public money we must surely be very careful of the legitimacy of our language in the political world, whereby one person's provision of fragile and risky space is another's environmental rationalisation. Let's use this panel to confront some of these contradictions head on.

Where does curating sit in a broader ecology of power? How can we talk about curating as a tool of transformation within that ecology of power, and what are the stakes, what are the real stakes? Who has the power and how is that power distributed amongst artists, curators and the public? If we talk through strategies of destabilisation, of distribution, of relationality, within the intellectual, conceptual and aesthetic circles that we inhabit, what happens when we begin to use those terms within the communities and the social milieus through which our work seeks to find its place?

Roman Vasseur

Paper delivered at
The Contingency of Curation



If we are to consider who is the author of our current forms of governance, configuring democracy and the conditions for cultural production, it would be the heroic but partially hidden spectre of Milton Friedman – progenitor of the Chicago School of Economics and avidly read by the current generation of economists. Friedman is the father of forms of governance arising out of an economic philosophy that:

- ☞ Privileges 'delivery' as both the means and the ends
 - ☞ Produces spaces for investment uncluttered by opposition
 - ☞ Ameliorates discussion of these processes
- ...and employs the notion of 'democracy' as a fuel to those processes. Hail Friedman!

This is the ethically nuanced money-plot, which the curators often find themselves bound within. A set of circumstances that often renders the authorship of what they do as that of the author individual as opposed to that of the author subject. A servant of public monies constantly looking to reconcile the specters of 'community' and 'the sovereign subject' but unable to morph these two opposing forces in that figure of the curator / author.

These are the conditions of to which contemporary curators find themselves contingent and yet I argue must make a claim for autonomy. And to do this must become religiously contingent and absolutely complicit.

Recent examples of curating - and in particular curating or the 'organisation of art' that does not take place in the gallery has at the core of its syndrome an inversion of delivery over content, in-line and contingent with the nature of the networked and investment led economies that are its many homes. Local histories, sub cultures, past injustices become the medium that floats the imperative of delivery.

If the nature of transaction exchanges in any given ecology of economics gives rise to its forms of governance (Ronald Coase The Nature of the Firm – 1937) then it may follow that the organisation of that ecology's 'art' into a form of discourse (i.e. curating) will begin to assume the rituals and apparent efficacy of the predominant aesthetic or those forms of transaction and exchange that are perceived to have the greatest velocity and symmetry. Boris Groys speaks in Art Power of the way in which business, due to its increased aesthetisation has moved towards art and therefore into a space that can be critiqued as art. Making it in fact unnecessary for art to move towards business in order for this to happen. This is a time where 'the meeting' has become the site and image of collaboration and creativity.

Assurance of delivery is paramount to an investment led economy and investment led regeneration and therefore it is a requirement of the consultation processes between agents and not actors in these processes that delivery becomes both form and theme... whilst what was considered content is now the medium that acts as a carrier for 'deliverables'. Therefore in large-scale multiple site projects a form of curating as meta-critique arises that platforms art as a series of democratic urges. Democracy may not fully operate in these spaces but is present as a form of magic or medium to the given priority of delivering investment at volume. In accordance with this process, Democracy becomes a quantity of magical stuff that will also be delivered to volume.

This suggests that the place of the art project in so many commissioning programmes is never really in danger of being inside anything. It just points at things. There are lots of 'theres' in contemporary art. Art, and in particular 'public art' or art that

persists in sustaining a phantom public, occupies the work-streams adjacent to public / private finance arrangements, and it is in these operations that service Market-led regeneration that an almost autonomous economy exists.

This related but near autonomous consultation economy - autonomous because it is often not factored into the overall cost of market led transaction exchanges - is that industry which serves Foucault's proposition that the deployment of culture in state / market arrangements makes it possible for the subject to be penetrated more deeply and mobilized into new post-Fordist arrangements of labour. A time and people fully socialized.



Let us Pray For Those of us Now Residing in the Designated Area, 2008

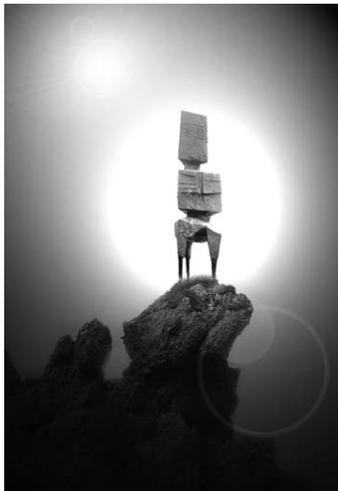
Temple architecture and video commission: Roman Vasseur, Diann Bauer and Amanda Beech. Photograph by Richard Davies, courtesy of Commissions East

The set of projects Let us Pray for Those Now Residing in the Designated Area which came out of an invitation to take up the not fully formed role of Lead Artist for a post war New Town sought to over identify with the classical but English modernist origins of a town, but through that lens afforded by time.



Let us Pray For Those of us
Now Residing in the
Designated Area, 2008
 Temple architecture and video
 commission: Roman Vasseur,
 Diann Bauer and Amanda
 Beech. Photograph by
 Richard Davies, courtesy of
 Commissions East

The title of the project is taken from a prayer of intercession used at the original service of dedication for the town. The role was two fold acting, on the one hand, as something akin to the Artists Placement Group's 'incidental person' sitting in on meetings with planners, councilors and developers and, in addition, working as an artist / curator for a series of temporary commissions in the town.



The collected works re-fictionalised that fiction which had sustained the act of state building that used 'art', and in particular sculpture, as a means of making a claim on democracy as continuous, 'natural', 'trans-historical', and arising out of the will of the unique and sovereign subject. Images of the English medieval village and the Italian city-state were grafted together and enabled by technology in order to make the case for a self-sustaining settlement. The original artworks and civic spaces currently appear as Jurassic Parks of fossilised art and regeneration policy.



The project was allied to a complex series of partners engaged in the regeneration and redevelopment of the town and, like many current similar arrangements, was an arrangement without an institution and therefore had little infrastructure in place to deliver the things factions within that arrangement wished to see happen. A process that would normally be serviced by free-lance, post-conceptual, dematerialised, dialogical practices that sustain an informalised notion of openness, multiplicity and a kind of perpetual newness. Or informational exhibitions in advance of a publication that offer empowerment through archeologised data. All having triumphed over the institution by having apparently broken its bounds.

Munira Mirza

Presentation at
The Contingency of Curation

I'm going to start off looking at 'what is a curator?' You have the advantage over me, because you spent the whole day discussing this, and I've spent the last ten minutes thinking about it, and trying to come up with some answers, but I think it would be interesting and useful to start with a view on what is the essence of being a curator; what is it that makes being a curator different from other professions, and which puts all curators in common.

Obviously curators work in very different contexts, they work in private galleries, they work in public galleries, they work in regeneration schemes, they might work in businesses, they might do different kinds of projects with different sorts of pressures. But the element of the curator, or the essential element of the curator is an ability to make a certain kind of judgement in a certain kind of area, and that area is traditionally in art - curating art.

That is their special area of expertise, that's their mastermind subject, that's the thing that they do that other people don't do, and they have a link in that sense with other kinds of professional individuals in the art world; art historians, people who verify the origins of a particular painting and so on. So there are particular kinds of professionals in the art world who have similar kinds of territories, but the curator is generally regarded as one who makes a judgement about the quality of work, the meaning of work, the possible various interpretations, and the critical analysis of work. But that's the thing they are regarded as an expert in.

This is I suppose what you might call, crudely, an enlightenment view of the curator who is empowered, or authorised to make judgements, so that they are special for that reason. In the way that a doctor is special because they make medical judgements and they can use their

expertise in a way that other professionals can't, they've built up a store of knowledge and a kind of training, so we recognise a curator as a profession in some ways. Traditionally, in art institutions, as the blurb to this session says, the curator would exist within a certain context where they would be allowed to practice their profession, and they would be, in a way, insulated from other pressures. So they would work in the public gallery, or they would work with a patron to protect them, and to allow them to make choices which were not affected by the grubby world of the market or political pressures or global political dynamics and crisis, that they would think freely and have a degree of autonomy. This is what the walls of the gallery or the patron's bank account would allow them, and give them freedom.

What a curator traditionally would not be, therefore, is an expert in other kind of areas; they

would not be expected to be an expert in town planning, or in local politics, or in how to make people feel good, or therapy or any of the other things that some of you might be asked to do in your own careers. They would be protected in the sense of what was expected from them. Even though they might well be interested in those areas, they might become fluent in those other types of expertise in their own time or as part of their own kind of thinking, it wouldn't be an expectation that was generally placed on them. Something I realise more and more in my own life is the older you get the less easy it is to acquire new types of expertise and you basically have to stick to one and be really good at it! Generally the pressure is not to try to do lots of things but to be good at maybe one of them.

So that is the conventional model of the curator. Now of course that's changed a great deal in the last twenty years for

lots of reasons. There are more pressures on a curator today in some ways than before and the expectation that all they do is make judgements about art and they decide where things go and who might or might not be in their exhibition or in their space, or who is and isn't worth collecting. Those expectations have multiplied and there is now a whole range of skills and types of expertise that a curator might want to take on. They might have to think more creatively, they have more of a persona so they are expected to be artistic in their approach. The idea of making a judgement that is based on some kind of objective authority, their ability to discern between a good artist and a bad artist. Maybe that's not quite so clear cut, maybe what they do is they think creatively about what would go well with what and with who, what kind of story am I trying to tell, what kind of narrative am I putting across? So the creativ-

ity of the curator is much more pronounced a feature of today's art world. Another feature of the curator's life is to think about other agendas, other people's agendas. Whether that's the shopping centre that's employing them to do community work or whether that's the Arts Council or whether that's some kind of local council who wants to employ someone to a regeneration scheme.

They are being expected not only to do a good piece of art, or organise a good art programme, they are asked to deliver some other outcomes like social cohesion or tourism, attracting people to an area, creating a bit of a stir, an iconic commission or something. So there are other agendas that they might take on, some of which they might agree with, some of they might not, but there is an expectation that they are doing this in a professional capacity.

It's also complicated by the fact that art itself is not simply art

in an institution anymore, and in fact the very act of art and the making of art is now something that's seen as involving the audience and the viewer very creatively. So it's no longer simply about producing a work of art and then the audience consuming it, but about the work of art being both the production of the content and the way in which the audience produces it. The audience's actual interaction is part of the artwork, that they are expected to make the artwork in the very act of consuming it, watching it and being involved in it. So that is both a new aspect to contemporary art and to curating.

Finally, the other question that the very act of judgement, the very notion that you can make judgements based on authority, is very unfashionable. What kind of authority do curators really have in this postmodern world where actually one thing is potentially as good as another and the people's art

work is just as impressive as the professional artist's, and the boundaries between what is considered art and what is considered not art is blurring, so there is this extra pressure. I think that makes it quite difficult for curators to say that what I choose, how I make things, my decisions about this particular programme or exhibition, is something that's worth defending. You could put holes in it, you could pick it apart and the curator is in very unstable territory in many ways, because after twenty years or so of the relativism of postmodernism, they're slightly stuck. How can they even attempt to say that they've got some special authority, and in fact aren't they implicated in the very structures, the very people who employ them, aren't they struggling to think outside the ideology and ... how many of you read Michel Foucault?

Yeah, well all of you, you've read quotes! The

early Foucault emphasises the disciplining logic of ideologies (you can't think outside these rituals and these practices, and, in fact, the subject is conditioned by the world in which they live, to an extent that it's very difficult to take a step back. Humans fail to be objective, they can't be objective in the way that the heroic enlightenment artist or curator used to be, so lets just get used to it.)

So in a nutshell, we have this ideal of a curator, which I presume most of you believe in to some extent, some of you might see yourselves professionally as going into that world. You have this idea that what you are doing is training yourself up to make judgements and to do a job, it might involve all these other features and elements, but essentially that's what you want to do.

So the question is, and the question posed in this blurb, is, can you still do that whilst whoring yourself to public re-

generation schemes and to Asda supermarket and everything else, and is that still possible. I'd love to say no. No, I think my view on it is very ambiguous, because I think it does depend on the individual, but what I would say is I don't think it's impossible. Whilst the walls of the institutions have come down to a large extent, the real protection, the real integrity, of the curator to make judgements and to exercise authority was always, since the eighteenth century, an intellectual one, and it was always one of the mind. It was never really one of patronage, although that helped. It was never one about being employed in an institution, or even within the public sector. It was always about having a critical frame of mind. In fact there are artists who were working in the post-war period who would be employed by towns like Harlow and other new towns that were built after the Festival of Britain who did think of themselves

as being quite radical, and because they were living within a politics that was fairly radical, it was very easy for them to touch and to have contact with radical politics and to not be so completely dictated by these structures that were paying them, that were employing them. Although you could argue that some of them were less radical than others. But I think at least in their own mind they had this view of themselves that they were able to think critically about the world. They weren't quite so reined in as we might imagine.

The other thing that's changed as well as the fact that whilst there are lots more expectations of the curator, in the last twenty years, there's also more repression, in terms of what artists can do. In some ways, curators are actually quite free to be sensationalist, shocking; you could probably get an Asda supermarket to commission a work of art about why they're so evil, and

it would be regarded as a great work of art! A lot of community arts programmes appear quite challenging, quite critical, and they will allow people to at least give voice to certain things. Some councils are a bit more flexible than others, but I think that the in last ten years or so, public art and community art programmes have become quite sophisticated.

However I think the question here is not so much can curators continue to be critical, and continue to think intellectually and objectively about the situation around them, under the pressure of funders and the structures in which they work, but to what extent they are intellectually capable and free, and radical, to make use of those opportunities and to think about them without fear and hindrance. There is obviously a great deal of pressure but like in all professions that have some kind of political edge to them, there is a great opportunity to work

in the world and work in new contexts. I think there are lots of opportunities to open up and change the way that we think about the world. I've met artists who have had a particular view of a community which has changed after having worked with that community. The problem is not so much that they are being told, or being forced or coerced in any way to repress that, its that they perhaps don't have the chance or opportunity to think openly and to debate that with their peers, and perhaps that says more about the ability to talk publicly and to have discussions and debates about some of these wider issues. I don't think that its beyond the realm of the possible for a curator to maintain their essence. It is, I think, not a bad role for an individual to have in the modern world, just as it was in the nineteenth century, in those museums and galleries, to be able to think about the things that art tells us, and the objects

or the works of art that are of a special value, and to be able to say that 'this is a view or a vision, or a narrative, that I believe in, that I think is accurate or honest, is still possible'. The fear that curators will be curtailed or repressed in some way is only one that curators themselves can challenge or take on. Perhaps I'm optimistic about it, perhaps too much, but it would be interesting to know what you all think about it.

Panel discussion

Transcript of panel discussion
and Q&A
mediated by Dr. Andrea Phillips

Andrea Phillips

Munira, we've spent the whole day beating ourselves up, and you've come along and given us an optimistic view of the curator, so thank you very much for that. It strikes me that you view the curator's role as being to do with thinking about other people. Of course that sounds very simple on one level but it is often forgotten in discussions about curating such as these. I wondered whether you could expand on this. On one hand it's a very simple statement, but on the other it is quite a political statement. In a sense; one could hear in it an implication that curators don't take that part of their role particularly seriously, that quite a lot of the debate might be very internalised, even though the role is supposedly outward facing.

Munira Mirza

I think that the curator, like lots of professionals - and there isn't anything unique in this, in what I'm saying - has to oscillate between a number of different objectives and agendas, and a curator both has to curate a content and programme which has its own internal logic, and which makes sense and would make sense to a professionalised

audience. It also has to communicate that to a public and be able to step outside the internal world of art and look at it externally, so it is quite a complex thing to be able to occupy a number of different positions at the same time, and that's why they're not just like an artist. We expect the artist in a sense to be much more willing to delve into the self and to stay there, whereas the curator I think has to be a bit more fleet of foot and keep jumping in and out of positions. I think that is a very important role.

Is it political? Well, yes in the sense that it's requiring someone to be critical about the last position that they just took, and to rethink it from a fresh angle. That's quite a discipline to be able to do that. The difficulty at the moment is that lots of the art world and curating and art history has developed its own language and its own logic, which has become quite impenetrable to the external viewer. I was joking about Foucault, but it's true, it is very difficult to read Foucault, he's a very great writer, but there is a problem. I think that the ability to jump in and out of positions and the demand to do that doesn't always exist, the pressure to do that is not always there. So should the curator think more

about people? Well, yes in a sense, but not to give up the integrity of what they're doing, the logic of the art work, but to perhaps try to communicate that better, I think that there is something worthy in that. I'm expecting people to shout me down and say we do that all the time and we're really good at it.

AP

I wonder if the problem is the modes in which we think about other people. Roman, do you think about other people?

Roman Vasseur

No, I think, I mean with reference to that question, the difficulty maybe that I have is that, in so many of these processes, the question that is asked of the curator is to be the public facing individual in an arrangement where other individuals within that arrangement are allowed to be private. Now, the discussions they have are as impenetrable, particularly with regard to regeneration, and particularly with regards to the economic reengineering that happens with redevelopment. If you said to anybody here, 'do you know how land banking works?' One person in the audience knows how land banking works. If we

talked to you about the ways in which you can invest in a new development which is different from twenty years ago, say Olympia & York in Canary Wharf, you don't buy a share in the company, you buy into the fabric of the building, you own twenty percent of the building so therefore you're not in danger of having your investment undermined by the company itself going into bankruptcy.

All those things aren't very complex things, but were you to ask those individuals to actually be public, to do that thing of demonstrating what they do, is to be very aesthetic, and when it happens, and when it goes up to consultation, the public is asked questions about a development of kinds, and very informal answers become very substantive as a result. Now, in a way, to ask that specialist development group using a very impenetrable language to also respond to very informal questions, they would say that they are not substantive enough, because there is a risk attached. So I would say that there is a very peculiar thing that happens with a request for art to be in some way accessible which is not asked of the same individuals. Now there are lots of reasons

for that, one of them is an expectation that this freelance individual; freelance because, as I say, they can be jettisoned at any time; difficult for the freelance individual because they are an institution of one, normally, and so they have to become this kind of meta-institution. I do think its highly problematic, from what I was saying earlier on in terms of thinking about what art is going to do either for art or for those other arrangements and those other ambitions of any regeneration exercise. I do understand, and this is obviously the danger, anything one does can be recuperated, and in particular in regeneration that is the rule; any thing you can do will be recuperated. My actions in that scheme may have been responsible for the conservatives getting in Harlow, I'm not quite sure, but it may have been a factor. I may have been used as a Trojan horse for certain interests coming from the region but not the local authority, so I do appreciate those things. So where have I kind of got to? Do I care about the public? Yes, I do, but I've always said I am a member of the public, now that is the curious nature of being an artist, and is also the curious nature of being a curator. It does

go back to this issue of always being to invoke, and particularly in regeneration exercises, it's a very a calculated decision at times, of when to invoke the opinion of the phantom public, because the public responds to informal consultation as it feels a public should do, in informal consultation ways. So yes it is very structured and it performs, in the way that journalism performs and makes other people perform. There is a kind of doublespeak that we all get into, no one is blameless in that way. It is about communication, but I also think its about misunderstanding at certain times, and I do think it's about not being held to reconcile things at times.

AP

Could you just repeat the last line of your presentation?

RV

Well, to believe and to be contingent to the point of destruction, that doesn't mean that I don't... I mean maybe its worth putting a caveat into that, which is that with regard to the last project we were just talking about, is that I do believe in that town, I do believe in the project, in its original project, but I do also believe that

it needs to be... the worst crime that one can sometimes commit is to believe in those arrangements in such a way that you really do make visible the actual values of a project that you're being associated with.

AP

Munira, did you want to come back on that?

MM

Well I'm not sure I understood the point your making about making art accessible, because I don't think its about trying to make art more accessible, and more easy. I certainly believe we should have challenging, difficult, art in the public realm. We just commissioned this huge big thing in the Olympic Park designed by Anish Kapoor and Cecil Balmond and people keep saying what is it? It's not easy, it is a very complicated structure, and it takes a bit of time to get your head around, but one thing it's not is easy. It does require a bit of a public debate and discussion about it.

Everyone is guilty of complicated language and not being clear when you need to be, and sometimes regeneration experts use that as a deliberate way of

avoiding explaining what is going on, but so do artists and curators. So we're all a bit guilty of that. I think that it is possible to have complicated complex art in public spaces, and art that's simple and beautiful doesn't always have a political message. It's possible to have all those things, but the role of the curator is quite an important one because it does mediate between the public and the art, and it is about choosing art that's appropriate for a place and so all those things need to be transparent in a sense, the decisions that the curator makes is more than just an arbitrary choice, and in order to have trust in that person you need to understand what their thinking is and why.

RV

But do you have any feeling about this operation of the curator in the public realm that sometimes seems to be this risk limitation exercise which is, or the presumption of a risk limitation exercise, is that one is producing the savage into the realm of the public. The curator acts as the sort of circus tamer to bring something in which may be difficult and maybe, you know. I've often seen in meetings the artist addressed as someone

who does not care about the public, and they're often addressed as somebody that does not understand the public, it's a very curious....

MM

Sorry, addressed by the regeneration panel...?

RV

Yeah, co-commissioning agencies and the partners in a commissioning agency can sometimes turn on artists and say 'You don't understand the public.' I think what they're sometimes talking to is a complexity of the public that they don't, they're not prepared to acknowledge in the figure of the artist. You almost expect that the curator is meant to be there to socialise the artist before they arrive, to be received by 'the public', whoever this public is.

MM

In a strange way I think actually what happens in regeneration is another thing, which is 'we need to engage with a public, we need to do some consultation, let's bring in some artists because they're usually quite good at it.' I'm not convinced that they are always, I mean there are pros and cons to

having artists being there. Consultation is essentially a political thing, and when you say 'let's engage the local public and get them to do drawings of what they'd like to see happen', you wonder if that's just an exercise in ticking a box.

You seem to be anxious about whether the artist is being taken seriously in their role for what they can do. My take on it is if an artist doesn't believe in a regeneration project as it is happening and unfolding, then they have to make a moral choice; should they be working for it at all? At some point you're assuming that the artist, by becoming complicit in the act consultation and being part of it, wants it to go ahead. They might want to affect the way that it happens, but they are effectively on the side of the people who are paying them, otherwise they are slightly morally compromised. I'm not assuming that the artist is being paid by the people, but the artist is being paid by the developer. If you object as an artist or a curator to the development that is happening then maybe start a campaign, there are other positions that you can take.

RV

Although, I would say, from experience, there is a culture within the commissioning of art attached to regeneration processes which assumes a kind of collaboration and a consultation, the actual collaboration, the site of collaboration where things happen, tends to be in the meeting room, and that culture is a culture of negotiation. It is a culture which has been described as by the architects Caruso St John, who did a study of this, that it is a culture of negotiation that someone must lose in order for somebody else to win. That is just a necessity of any of those arrangements. I've been in on meetings when you walk out of the door the architect says to you: 'Well you can't win everything.'

Sometimes those arrangements within art and regeneration assume quasi-educational academic roles where we believe, as we enter the classroom, that everybody is going to win in that arrangement, everybody is going to accrue, there's going to be some sort knowledge production. Regeneration by its very nature is contestation, and the partners need to go into a room thinking that they won't lose as much as the other person. 'I don't want

to give all the money for the new library, I don't want to give the fifty million for the new theatre, I want the other person to give twenty-five million for the new theatre.' All these sorts of things, 'we'll give them the road but we won't give them the sewage.' I think there is an odd disparity between that actual hardcore negotiation and the kind of negotiation that happens with what ultimately really are consumers of the kinds of spaces which are produced out of these arrangements. If I want to look for any kind of change I would hopefully look for some kind of change where, really, what we're seeing is a kind of, going back to Ronald Coase, is you see if there isn't a dominant ideology in any particular situation, you get a paralysis in regeneration. Regeneration tends to take longer in this country than it does in some other countries, and for that reason a lot of other people make a lot of money from that process. I would like to see that culture change.

MM

What do you want to see different? What is it about the current process? I'm not disagreeing, I just want to understand what is it you want to challenge.

AP

From here, can we focus back on the role of the curator? Both of you, in different ways, proposed to me the concept of the curator as an idealised citizen. This is perhaps another character we can add to the set that have discussed today: the curator as the mediator, the curator as the collaborator, the curator as the researcher, the curator as the invisible person, the curator as the egotistical exhibitor of him or herself, etc. The reason I suggest the curator as an ideal citizen is because of some of the things that you have said. Firstly I was very interested Roman in your invocation of belief. I'm going to paraphrase you badly; you suggested that in your role as both an artist and a curator, that you believed to the end of the project, in a sense, and that the provocation of the project is that you keep on believing when everybody else has stopped believing.

It seems to me there was something also in the way in which, Munira, you were suggesting the capacity of the curator to retain an intellectual capability and whose role was to deal with that intellect in the world (and that it was thus paradoxical

and difficult.) was also an act of good citizenship Both proposals are idealised and both are, in the same sense, exemplary. I'm wondering whether we can think of the curator as an ideal citizen, in the respect that he or she performs properly, in a situation where everybody else has not quite hit the mark (or is unable to do so).

RV

I think that that's a really interesting idea, and I think...

AP

It's also a problematic idea.

RV

Its a very problematic idea, but it's a citizen, going back to what we were saying before, that is conditioned by, for example, if its the economic arrangement, they are conditioned by the loyalty and stability of money, of public money. The idea that the funds which you are receiving are those tied to taxes which have imperatives behind them. Yes, you are a good citizen because you are using good and stable money, and that's the curious part of the arrangement, and a very problematic one. It's another caveat to something we said at the end of the talk,

which I can't resolve myself, but it is a question of contingency. Yes, you talked about the good citizen, and I talked about being the good citizen to the point where you become like Voltaire's *Candide*, your optimism is tested brutally in any number of situations. How you resolve the issue of simply, as with talking with Emma Dexter earlier on, that you as a curator feel that you want to use the money that you are given properly, and you want to use it efficiently. It doesn't afford you any opportunity to do the things that politicians do sometimes, which is to be quite brutal in the way that you reengineer money, you move money around, you think of it as abstract, in a liquid fashion, in a brilliant fashion. I admire it a great deal, I think these people are incredible, but I think those two are contingent things, and how to achieve that is extraordinarily difficult.

MM

I think we should all try to be a good citizen, and the point is important, because politicians are expected to be good citizens too, and they should. They might not always live up to it, but curators and artists don't always live up to it either, none of us fully live up to

the ideal. Being good at your profession and doing particular narrow job well is part of contributing to society. Being a good doctor is part and parcel of being a good citizen in many ways. Sometimes a good doctor goes home at the end of the day and is also a good citizen by doing other things, or by the way that they think, or the way they vote, or the choices that they make outside their particular profession, and I don't think any of us are just one thing, we're many things. The issue that's been unpicked here and is there is some confusion, or it seems unclear to me, at what point you are acting as a curator and at what point you are acting politically. Some people manage to do both at the same time and that's great, but not everybody does, and that's inevitable. I've done jobs in my life where I've done one thing during the day and then I've gone home in the evening and done other things, and they've not always matched up, and sometimes they've been contradictory, but that is the necessity of a public and private life. The real pressure on curators today is not necessarily to try and maintain your political integrity around a regeneration programme, but it is just to try to maintain critical

intellectual distance. The pressure on that is also one of the art world and the cultural world generally, our ability to think about things is not simply about the big bad politicians or the big bad corporates.

The reason I wanted to end on an optimistic note is only because we often underestimate our ability to speak freely in our society. We talk about all the impositions on our society, and I am a big campaigner against the imposition of civil liberties, but my point has always been that we still think freely, we do have this enormous capacity to organise debates and conferences and to talk. There is more leeway in some ways in the structures of regeneration schemes than we think.

RV

Yes, there are many presumptions in the process that stop people from actually engaging in the opportunities that exist. That's the thing I've always found very interesting. Yes, there is the democratic impulse, the desire for democracy, but I think the question still remains of how one renews that democracy. Maybe the problem with, one wants to be a good citizen, but we see, we allow an artist to indulge their

irrationality, as [unknown] puts it, their being given permission to be irrational. Do we allow curators to be irrational, that is in order to renew that being a good citizen, or is that concept of the good citizen always something we just afford to artists?

AP

What I'm trying to do is propose a different model whereby the radicality that we seem to still require is actually proposed through some complete identification with rationality, rather than conforming to concepts of fragility and risk that disallow certain forms of governmental or civic action.

RV

That would be my approach.

MM

Rationality is not a bad thing.

AP

No. Well, look, we've solved it up here. So let's open it up. Who's got a question?

Martin Slavin

My name is Martin Slavin, I'm a member of a group based in the east end, who are critical of the Olympics, and run a website

which is called 'Games Monitor'. We have been researching the Olympics for about the last four years. My question is not so much a question, its sort of a response to what you have all said. Err, the thing I find most interesting about each of you is that it comes over very clearly that you are all fascinated by power. Your responses to power are quite different Munira and Roman strike me as people who are anxious about power and have taken different responses to deal with that anxiety. Roman has responded to it by surrendering to it completely at the beginning by saying 'resistance is futile'. I have been noting down some of the things that you have said, which are 'anything you do will be recuperated'.

RV

No...

MS

That's what you said, I wrote it down. The other thing that you said, you misquoted yourself earlier on, you said 'To curate is to believe, and be contingent to the point of destruction.' The art work that you showed, interestingly enough, it is an artwork that I have seen before, and it comes across

as very powerful, and I think it actually echoes your fascination with power. It is a very complex work because it's built around a container. Now, the container is one of the key essential technologies of neo-liberal democracy. And you have decorated that in a way that puts across the same message that you are talking about, which is that resistance is futile. Okay, that's all I have to say about you at the moment.

Munira's response to her anxiety about power is not to take a position about anything, to be very compliant to power. I can't remember when I last listened to so much boring clichés, anodyne clichés, about the topic under discussion. To the point that I was trying to concentrate on what you were saying, but my mind would not allow me to pay attention. I can just imagine the job interview that you got with Boris where they realised 'yes you're the right person for the job because we can push you around'.

I'm one of those people who has to deal with the impact of the Olympic project on the local artistic culture, and the response of that, what has happened is that that local artistic culture is being destroyed. The Olympics have

gone over budget, sadly, inevitably, and in order for them to draw in more money into that project they have taken two billion quid out of the national lottery project which funds a large number of artistic endeavours, so a lot of freelance artists are now very short of money. One of the main artistic projects of the cultural Olympiad is that the money has been granted to several regions all around the country, there has been a competition for this all around the country, and I knew before I read it that I was very unlikely to find something that was interesting. I won't carry on much longer. Unfortunately my prediction was borne out. They are projects which are either anodyne, purely objective things which have no subjective interaction with the context in which they emerge, and the one project that jumped out of the competitive submissions was the one that was put in by Nitin Sawhney, which was called the bedroom symphony...

AP

I'm really sorry, but if we could just wrap...

MS

I'm nearly finished...

AP

...because lots of people want to ask questions.

MS

...and his project was turned down, and it was easily the best. That is all I have to say.

AP

OK, well I get off scot-free. Thank you very much. That was a statement rather than a question so I'm going to move on.

Yes?

Billie Rae Vinson

Well, that's a bit hard to follow... I was just going to say that, you know, you were asking for the students to ... well I'm Billie and I'm part of the group who curated this panel. Part of the reason we asked you three together was because we wanted to create a frictional argument, which it seems to have done...

AP

No, we agree!

BRV

I think one of the things that we were talking about, referring to your idea of the ideal citizen, was this idea of that being really a

good thing, that that is what people want. The mediation of the curator, its criticalism, to be critical, that's their language, like Munira was saying, and I was just wondering about how that all fits in with the idea of the ideal citizen, I guess that's why you said it was problematic. Is it just this constant spiral where you go round and round and you just end up being this kind of critical tool. I just wondered how you were explaining the ideal citizen in a new way.

AP

When I suggest the curator as an ideal citizen, I choose the terms ideal and citizen very carefully. I certainly don't propose it as in the conventional understanding of the ideal citizen which is somebody who behaves well, co-operatively and etcetera. I'm much more interested in what we are proposing the curator to be in terms of an example, an exemplary character, because we are in the business of developing power relations, all the time. What does it mean to act in these circumstances? What does it mean to be fragile and precarious? Of what is this an example? I am also suggesting that to be an example is to be both actor and author. And to be exemplary of

citizenship is extremely problematic when you exemplify what you are not and do not believe in. So the friction that Roman described, for instance, in a complete belief in the idea of the democratic ideal of Harlow town, the belief that is sustained for so long and in a performative sense, as well as a realistic sense, that it is the only belief left standing, supposes a kind of exemplary role that becomes political for curators. That's the only politics in a way a curator can effect, because all the other terms and politics that we might try and throw at a curator; to be radical, to suggest alternatives, to be inside the institution or be outside looking in, or to disrupt 'No Soul for Sale', those kinds of things, they're not really political in the same sense, in terms of power. If we are talking about politics, then we cannot talk about politics without talking about power.

There was another question up ... yep... sorry, there's one right at the back, did you have your hand up? And then we'll come down to Galia. Yes, thank you.

Unknown

Thank you. I just wanted to go back over the idea of the public

realm, because we talk of the public, we talk of the public realm, but of course there are many different definitions of the public realm. If you take Jurgen Habermas' idea of the public realm, it should be about the idea of congregating in spaces, without interference from the authorities; total freedom of expression without interference. Yet I think curators and artists in the public realm actually have much less freedom, and they are very restricted. There is nothing about the spontaneity of the temporary moment, you have to go through so many planning agreements... All of these issues become restrictive on the freedom of expression for artists. I'm not suggesting here in this room, perhaps we can speak as we want, but I'm saying in the public realm, in terms of your definition, its very very problematic. The public is not the audience for art, the general public as you say, we're talking about different publics and different issues, and they are crossing over but I'd quite like it to be a little bit clearer on those issues.

AP

So let me just clarify your question, you're asking which way we are using the term public realm?

Un: I'm suggesting that when we are talking about having all these regeneration schemes and public art, or artists working in the public, it's still problematic to call it the public realm, because I think it is more restrictive on artists and curators.

AP

OK, Thank you. Munira?

MM

I realise I have been too clever for my own good and I've come in trying to give my viewpoint in a slightly different way to what I usually do. What I usually do when I come to these conferences; I say there is a real problem with the lack of freedom in our public realm, and I spend half an hour complaining about increasing infringements on our ability to interact spontaneously! For example the growth on restrictions of people photographing in the public realm,. I spend a lot of time saying that, and I'm so conscious of the fact that I say it all the time and I bore people to death, that I thought I'd try something different this time, and I'd say that there are these restrictions on our freedom, but ultimately, as human subjects,

we are able to resist those restrictions. I don't believe that politics is dead, and I don't believe that we are all so restrained, so infringed, that we can't challenge any of these things. Just to make my position clear, I do think there is a serious problem with the public realm, and often that is about self censoring and self restriction as well as the restriction of authorities. I think it is absolutely right that artists challenge it. I think it is also right that artists don't just challenge it in their art, but that they join petitions and campaign groups. I spent ten years of my life trying to encourage people to join them, and they always say they're too busy because they're doing an exhibition for the Olympics. It's a bit frustrating, but I can understand if that if you are passionate about these things then there are many avenues actually through which to express them.

On regeneration, I think that there are good regeneration projects and there are bad regeneration projects, and I have argued against some particularly bad ones in London. I'll say on record that I think that the Rich Mix project in East London, which was not a decision made by a curator but by politicians, was

a mistake in the way that it was conceived and developed, and I hope that will transform itself and become something genuinely of public value. But there are certain regeneration projects which you wouldn't say no to, like Harlow after the Festival of Britain, and I think lots of those new towns. I can see the optimism, I can see why the Barbara Hepworths and Henry Moores of this world were happy to have their art commission, because there was a genuine sense that these were good things. I don't think that regeneration per se is a bad thing, or reconstruction, or building is bad, I don't think change is bad. I don't have a problem with cities that choose to bulldoze down parts of their city, not in a kind of heroic modernist way, but a way we genuinely want to improve things. I do think it has to be done intelligently, and I would agree that the Olympics and the LDA (London Development Agency) under the previous administration (I would say that), did not work as sensitively as it could in the past, with that community. I hope that that has changed. That's not to be an apologist, but I do recognise that there have been failures in that way, so we have to now address them, because we

have inherited the Olympics. I'm not being a complete cheerleader, I recognise the pitfalls, all I would say is that these things are still within our capacity, and to give up on them is not the act of a good citizen, never mind a good artist or curator.

RV

The public realm, it's a big question, and one that has been an anxiety making one in the last couple of years. My anxiety about it, if you are talking about those new town space after the Festival of Britain, is that there was a pact that there would be civic spaces that would be non-retail lead and that caused a great concern in a number of places where they feel that they should still not be retail lead. The South Bank Centre is an example of where that has become altered, where there was a contract that it would not be a commercial space, but now is. There are restrictions on that because the land is leased for a hundred and twenty-five years to the developer, and therefore they have care taking rights and so on. But there are strategies around that; that is a constant fight, but it is also a fight that is often not addressed by some politicians in

a weird kind of way, because they haven't understood the economics. It's very peculiar to sit on in meetings where you find that you're with politicians from left, middle, centre, far right, right, who argue for balance in terms of public and private life, and public and private space, without understanding the financial arrangements which deliver those kinds of spaces; literally manufacture and produce those spaces. One always assumes in one's naivety that the politicians would do some kind of three day basic course in economics, and how that manufactures space, and how if you enter into a fiscal arrangement with a developer, that certain things happen, which means that you don't necessarily get the kinds of public spaces that you want. The other aspect to this is that the idea of what is public, and certainly what is a public individual, and the difficulty I am finding with some of these projects and my involvement in them is the notion that there is public and private, and increasingly there is a notion, there is a feeling that one is public all the time. That has radically changed how one might think about what is a civil contract between individuals in those sorts of spaces,

if those sorts of spaces still exist, which is very difficult to believe when one has children in London. Also, just to add to that, I think that the nature of public space is changing so radically and so fast and so invisibly that I think a lot of people don't actually understand quite how fast and how quickly and how radically.

AP

I don't think that there is a pure space we can call the public realm- I would disagree with Habermas. All space is striated with power and privacy in complex ways, exemplary citizenship acts within this.

Next question, Galia.

Galia

When Roman said earlier that anything you do within the context of regeneration will be recuperated, I was actually concerned about the opposite of what Martin pointed out, which is, is there anything that will not be recuperated outside of regeneration? I think this came out of Munira Mirza's presentation as well, an assumption that there might be an outside to social engagement, so that what happens in a gallery is not a part of society in some

way. I was just wondering why whoring yourself to a supermarket would be any worse than whoring yourself to a patron, and whether there was indeed such a thing as an art with no political message? I think Munira said at some point that art could be presented with no politics at all, and I don't think there is such a thing. To me there is just art that in some way affirms the dominant politics and art that negates it or challenges it.

MM

I'm not quite sure what wording I used, I think the point was more that there is certainly context in which the artist is not obliged to the same extent as other contexts to do what there paymasters are telling them. So there are certain contexts in which they have a bit more freedom. Whether all art is political is a big issue and I don't know if I could answer that.

G

You'll find that from reading Foucault, I think, I learned that there is no such thing as being free to express yourself...

MM

Ah, did you read late Foucault!? He changed his views slightly.

G

I'll read the wikipedia.

Amanda Beech

I have a similar question I think, and...

AP

Try to make it a bit different.

AB

I was really interested and surprised how much the panel seemed to start off in a Foucauldian manner, and then end up with Kant, which I was a bit surprised about it in terms of idealism and duty, and private and public discussions. But, what it made me think about, across the discussion today, was how there has been a general description of this entanglement of culture and politics, and that seems to have been described as something that is desired by both those who are interested in corporate, private business, but also something that is wanted by the Left, in general, this merging of culture and politics. Now, it seems that has been proven, it has proven itself, that culture and politics are entangled in this very difficult territory that you have both been looking at

today, and discussing. What I was wondering was about, in terms of how you see the future of, say, curatorial or artistic practice in these contexts. I was thinking about what you might be advocating, and I couldn't help but go back to Foucault, because we've been reflecting on it so much, and I kept thinking about his idea of heterotopias, and this production of other spaces that are very representational, they are very imaged, and they are very much not involved in what we might consider to be non-representational, invisible, participatory practices, because they have borders, and they are discreet spaces that operate critically because they are secure, they are securitised, away from the technologising eye of the big Other, let's say, of ubiquitous dominance. I couldn't help but want to ask you a question about whether you were advocating actually a return to representationalism, and I thought that might be something to consider in light of this idea rationality as well. Maybe it leads on from Galia's question.

RV

I feel this odd thing of maybe having made a claim for the return of the classical avant-garde. I think

the case I am making is almost a case for galleries and museums. I don't really believe in Agamben's thing of the terrible museumification of the world, which is a grumpy old man view that museums are awful. I do think that museums and galleries do actually... they are public spaces, but are also places of separate and differentness, and so therefore they are places in which some things can be radically reinvented. Therefore I do see them as being, I think, and Galia can correct me, is a question about whether things just don't take, if they don't take purchase, was that what you were saying? That things that happen in the gallery don't actually become the event and don't have a purchase on the situation, and so therefore don't become an actuality, but maybe I'm just extrapolating there.

MM

I agree with the point Roman just made about why we need galleries and museums, I think they are special places precisely because they are not like other places. There is an interesting trend in recent years to take down the walls of the galleries or to take art outside the galleries, which I think

has been a positive thing, I'm not an absolutist against it, but it is important to recognise why galleries came to be in the first place; the public enjoyment of art, and they are in some ways insulated or protected. It might be a slight fiction, but it is a necessary one because what goes in a gallery, the choice that curators make about what appears in a gallery, means that they are endowed with a certain value, which is a value that is artistic and it doesn't exist outside in that way, it doesn't exist as a market value or as a political value, it exists for its own sake and for its own value. The gallery and the museum perhaps might be more anxious about that today, about that particular role, because talking about art for art's sake is a deeply unfashionable thing, but it is actually a necessary function of a gallery or a museum. Recognising that and coming to terms with that is a good thing.

AP

I have one last question of Munira. Is there any way we can stop the Anish Kapoor being built?

MM

There is a funny answer and there is a serious answer. The writer

Maupassant, when the Eiffel Tower was built, hated it so much that he said that the only place that he could bear to have lunch everyday was at the top of the Eiffel Tower, as it was the one place he couldn't see it. Everyone hated the Eiffel Tower when it was built and I'm hoping that people will fall in love with the Anish and Cecil piece - the collaboration is one of the things that makes it interesting.

In the end there was a panel of people who are drawn from the great and the good of the art world, Nick Serota, Julia Peyton-Jones. If you had to pull together a panel of arts advisors it's not a bad place to start. If you are going to try to build something big, a big art commission, there is a process that you end up following, it isn't perfect. Yes, potentially you could stop it, you could mount a huge campaign if you want to, but the reaction has been largely positive, particularly in east London.

AP

Thank you very much to the panel.

Postscript

Critical Writing and Curatorial
Practice

The panel Curating Friction – Between Complicity and Contingency curated by Critical Writing Curatorial Practice featured discussion between the invited speakers, Munira Mirza and Roman Vasseur, mediated by Andrea Phillips. We invited these speakers, in order to purposely instigate a frictional argument between them. We take up, as response, key points which emerged from this discussion around positions on the nature and responsibilities of the curator within the expanded field of art.

In preparing for this panel Critical Writing Curatorial Practice met with Andrea Phillips to discuss the potentials for friction as part of a curatorial method. The struggle that we have seen arise in this panel discussion around the notions of complicity versus political agency can also be thought through as a process in time. Andrea Phillips suggested that 'it is interesting to think about the contingencies of curating and the concepts of friction on a timeline'. So to think through the potential for the notion of friction, or the combative processes of curation we can ask 'at what point does one insert friction into a model and at what point does one withdraw it, where is it productive?'

This discussion seemed to suggest that this point of productivity does lie within the projects carried out in the public realm. Perhaps this is possible through instances of the rupturing of public space but for this rupture to occur the artist/curator absolutely must assume a political position.

One viewpoint which emerged throughout the panel and later through discussion was the notion of the need for the artist or curator to maintain critical distance within any project but particularly those held within the public realm. This, it was argued by Munira Mirza, is a more important value to hold than the artist/curator's own political integrity. This need for distance seems to point towards a naturalised division between art and politics, that both cannot occur or succeed simultaneously; something at odds with a wider contemporary understanding of all art as being political. The Belgian political theorist Chantal Mouffe explicates such an understanding:

“I do not see the relation between art and politics in terms of two separately constituted fields, art on one side and politics on the other, between which a relation would need to be established. There is a aesthetic dimension in the political and there is a political dimension in art”.

- Chantal Mouffe, ‘Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces’.

Counter to this is the notion of a political position as being necessary to any artistic/curatorial practice, but particularly needed, as Roman Vasseur pointed out, within public projects. The artist is a member of the public he is working in and therefore a political being. Contrary to the artist needing critical distance, the artist in fact requires a political position to avoid merely reproducing generalised objective judgement in a situation greatly influenced by the contingencies of economic power. How this political position is upheld and manifested however is open to debate. Vasseur pointed to his own invocation of complete belief in a project as a method of not only maintaining political agency but also of ensuring that this position is carried throughout the project. This notion of belief in a given process depends upon an understanding and an absolute faith that art holds a very real political agency.

Within this discussion around the public nature of the artist/curator there is a further debate surrounding how this disciplinary position is communicated to a wider public and the extent of this, perhaps constructed, responsibility. Munira Mirza made a claim against the specialised ‘impenetrable’ language of art, suggesting that it is the responsibility of the curator to ensure that this language is translated for the public audience, an integral part of a view which considers curation to be about ‘thinking about other people’. To claim the necessity for the lingual accessibility of a discipline is to target this discipline from all other specialisations and to declare art’s role as being primarily for public ‘good’. This notion of the curator as public intellectual again works counter to the ability or need for political position.

In understanding the curator’s role as both political agent and as a communicator responsible to a wider public, how do we begin to address these issues within the contingent environment of a public project? Andrea Phillips pointed towards a further understanding of the curator as ideal citizen; this conception of the curator allows for Vasseur’s assertion of the artist/curator being a member of the public but also takes this further to claim the role as being an example of good citizenship. In this model the curator ‘performs properly in a situation where everybody else has not quite hit the mark’, perhaps mirroring the notion of an absolute belief in seeing a project through to completion or to destruction.

However, when attempting to reconcile this notion of the good citizen with the curator as having a political position, we witness an agonistic process. We use the notion of ‘agonism’ through its development by Chantal Mouffe. Understood in contrast to ‘antagonism’ which signifies a friend / enemy divide, ‘agonism’ is on the other hand founded on a friend / adversary model, where we can uphold political plurality and differences and contest these in public, whilst respecting the adversaries’ right to act. Therefore, to develop this notion of the artist/curator as responsible public figure through political agency, we can revisit the frictional model of a given process. Where these often opposing roles come together throughout a process we can test out particular points of frictional activity, encouraging rupture, tension and agonism in the curatorial method.

Perhaps we can see this in the work Temple of Utopias in Harlow, mentioned earlier in this section, where Roman Vasseur’s role was ‘two-fold’. On the one hand acting as an ‘incidental person’ sitting in on meetings with planners, councillors and developers and, in addition, working as an artist/curator for a series of temporary commissions in the town. Vasseur had a public responsibility here but also, as political agent sought to create ‘a horror vacui’, a ‘play for democracy’ through a curatorial process that indeed featured radical and frictional intentions and actions.

Email dialogue

Marie-Anne McQuay &
Roman Vasseur

To expand on some of the issues raised at the conference, MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice at Chelsea College of Art and Design have invited speakers Roman Vasseur and Marie-Anne McQuay to enter into an email dialogue around some key questions that we have drawn from their presentations at the Tate Britain in May 2010.

Marie-Anne McQuay, Curator at Spike Island in Bristol, spoke as part of the first panel, The Autonomous Curator, organised by students at the University of Essex. Marie-Anne raised the notion of the curator as having some sense of intellectual autonomy; we ask how this interacts with the idea, later raised by Roman Vasseur in the third panel Curating Friction, of the curator as being implicit within the economic processes of any given project. Is there a space for intellectual autonomy and how does this relate to economic complicity within, for example, the curatorial act that takes place in regeneration schemes?

What follows is the email discussion held by Roman and Marie-Anne which commenced in July 2010. This discussion emerged from these initial questions, which aimed to draw connections between panels and to widen the discourse past the event of the conference.

Dear Roman

Our two respective panels - The Autonomous Curator and Curating Friction – Between Complicity and Contingency - naturally appeared to hedge towards each other's (assumed) positions. The autonomy panel admitted degrees of complicity and contingency through our self-confessed implication in both public policy and market forces, whilst your complicity/contingency panel debated where artistic autonomy might lie within an inherently complicit and contingent process - the commissioning of public art.

The merging of our positions is in part because these terms - autonomy, complicity, and contingency - are concomitant states of being, rather than alternatives or absolutes. It may be that we debate these terms in the abstract but I'd like to start by addressing them through their more mundane applications, otherwise known as our respective practices. After all, you and I could just as easily have spoken on the apparently opposing panel based on our respective experiences. You are an artist and researcher who more usually works in a gallery context and who has an autonomous or

independent practice, whilst I have previously worked over several years on regeneration based collaborative commissions with artists such as Superflex and Stephen Willats and therefore have never seen curating as beginning and ending in the proverbial white cube.

So...one thing that interested me specifically about www.artandthenewtown.org.uk and which I didn't get the chance to ask at the time, was who was your main supporter within the web of relationships you had to negotiate and manage as lead artist and how did they feel about the slightly dark tone of the work? They must have 'got it' - your practice - to allow you to shape the project as you did and invite the artists you did. I only ask this because art commissioned for the public realm tends towards the celebratory, affirmative and commemorative whilst 'Art & the New Town' managed to evade these cliché's. I'd be interested to know who defended your autonomy and where they sat within the various power structures of Harlow Newtown.

Best wishes,
Marie-Anne

Dear Marie-Anne

My supporters for the Harlow project were mainly politicians or senior county council representatives, plus a development expert in the regeneration organisation. To varying degrees I think the idea of an artist who was willing and able to contest ideas in meetings was attractive as I was asked to be part of processes where a degree of contestation is a requirement. By this I mean partnership meetings where the different parties are brokering what each will commit to a project, how much resource, land, grant, infrastructure etc. So the hard economic end of regeneration rather than the soft political end of neo-liberal economics that art typically figures in as a form of consultancy. The main part of my role was to inflect the design process and inform the selection of a developer aside from curating the temporary projects.

I have a brief history of part-devising and managing public art projects and so know a little of how procurement and contracting arrangements work. This and some knowledge of architecture I think gave a level of assurance that made individuals prepared to support and defend the other aspects of the work. I don't think I was the commissioning agencies first choice though. Which is telling. Had the temporary projects simply topped and tailed the processes I've described above then I don't think the same level of support would have existed. The commissions ended up being seen as part of a longer, more far-reaching

process. Plus there was a sense that the town had challenged public expectations in the past and needed to do so again. So I don't think there was always a full understanding of what the curating was doing, but there was a level of trust, much as there might be in a public gallery. I continually argued against an instrumentalised deployment of art, and this approach on the whole was supported, mainly because of the degree of engagement in the town by myself and some of the other artists. There was some fall out from the projects but an underlying support that saw the core fan base stay in place. Problems really arose from there being too many people involved in the process. Everybody wanted a go at curating that had no previous experience of it or of contemporary art. I mean on a micro management level. The arts meetings could have really learnt something from the contesting nature of the regeneration meetings.

I think the thing I've not been able to do is frame that role in a way that talks about its performative nature. In other words, it falls towards a kind of utilitarianism or function towards enabling art to happen? In the end, the role can be a case of stamina and sustained periods of impeding your imagination to survive the endless meetings and assurance giving. I think this plus the experience of dealing with some willfully naive artists is what finally does in some curators who you find at Biennales acting in a highly paranoid way, bloating from drink and disorientation. Of course the same happens to artists. I don't think I'm arguing for the celebrity, auteur

curator here but I wondered what your thoughts and experience were / is vis a vis this functional nature of the curator versus a version of that role in parenthesis? Are you able to be reflexive in the role? Can a degree of autonomy be found from occupying a role? As opposed to seeking enthronement as an auteur? I'm asking you as somebody working in spaces that have public objectives rather than a private gallery but perhaps some of what Emma Dexter was talking about could be brought to bear on this topic?

Best wishes – Roman

Dear Roman, I agree that the roles we assume in the art world are inherently performative, we are all playing a part and assuming roles with the intention of driving things on through sheer belief and willpower - there's still room for reflexivity within this momentum but a momentum needs to be maintained along with a sense of a trajectory, a destiny for the work even, if that wasn't too overblown a term. Someone needs to care, to give due care and attention, which takes us back to the original definition of curator. With added criticality now however - the contempo-

rary curator is not just someone valued for aesthetic judgment or their ability to ask others to hang work at eye height, but as someone who is part of a discourse and producing within that discourse, a discourse that takes in the history of the exhibition as well as the art history, that draws from theory and philosophy but which is also rooted in wider cultural concerns. It distinguishes what we do from other roles in the art world that don't have the expectation of authorship or sharing authorship. It's therefore what we seek in order to stay sane, as an

evolving intellectual project, but also visible too, visible in the 'right' way - criticality is needed to enhance the reputation of a private gallery and stop it from being just a shop for shiny or difficult things and it also adds an edge to a public programme. Approbation from art world peers is something that public spaces seek alongside popularity with wider audiences. I think all of us on the panel in the morning, whether public or private sector focused, were therefore implicated in the search for criticality as well as autonomy as a need and a given. Both of which are perhaps slightly grandiose terms too for the day to day practice of curating - criticality can simply stand in for 'reading a book' and autonomy for 'getting to make a relatively unhindered decision'.

Back to Harlow, that crucial distinction you make around your role - you taking on the part of someone brought in to contest decision-making processes from the start, rather than decorating a completed project - is why the project looked like an art work taking place in a specific context, rather than something trying to camouflage in with its environment. The role I'm least keen on in public realm projects is artist

as fall guy, not just in the after thought ones - i.e. here's a nice art project to make up for knocking your house/library/local pool down - but those masquerading as 'consultancy'. The ones couched in rhetoric that 'this art work will involve you, the community, in decisions about major changes in your area', whereas the decisions have already been made a long time ago and, generally, centrally, rather than locally. These are also the ones in which the artist never gets to sit down with anyone more influential than the stressed out arts manager who brokered the commission with the now absent developer and who is then thrown into a room of angry residents, aware they're being fobbed off. It's less curating, more degrees of damage limitation though strange and wonderful things can emerge if a project is allowed to drop the charade of consultancy and go on its own trajectory.

Obviously artistic careers are made or at least rather maintained on such projects too. There's a spectrum of approaches, including practices that are concerned with displaying themselves primarily to the art world by assuming some kind of radicality often based on dubious class

politics. Then there are ones like yours, which fight back for some space, some autonomy, some possibility for the artwork to be a productive disruption, to signal something out to the world, if not to evade the circular processes of regeneration. Given also that the tide (on this tiny island at least) has now finally turned from 'regeneration' to 'economic development', with the creative industries playing their part (web design will save us all) arguments about complicity in regeneration processes also feel a little more historic than they otherwise have done a year ago. I should also add that I'm borrowing the term 'signal' from Esther Leslie who proposed that this might be one small claim that art can now make, given its subsumption within the instrumentalised creative industries (from the paper 'And they call it

recuperation' as part of the symposium 'Who's Recuperating Who?' 26th November 2009, Arnolfini, Bristol).

As an aside to all of this, I'm curious to know if your involvement with developers i.e. being involved higher up the food chain than most artists can expect to be, was at times quite....thrilling? Probably the wrong word but did you find the power inherent in people who can make sweeping changes i.e. private developers, quite seductive? I mean their ability to make radical, decisive and sweeping change through their capital. The power that good liberals aren't meant to enjoy (not that I'm calling you a good liberal I hasten to add). The public sector after all moves comparatively slowly and is quite often paralysed in decision-making processes that try and accommodate everyone's needs.

Dear Marie-Anne - Yes - power, or the potential for power in those circumstances is thrilling! The feeling seductive, fast moving, a believable symmetry. Everything you might want to achieve in the studio and with your audience. Also violently utopian - something else that you might want to achieve as an artist. The taking of power or moving towards a centre of power is

seen by many artists as highly suspicious and the crossing over into a darkness that must not be contemplated because it undermines an aristocratic exteriority or the possibility of 'difference'. It also undermines a paradigm that constructs a recognisable centre to power - a paradigm that is sometimes necessary for making art and critiquing power when in fact power in western democracies often has no specific locale to address.

On the one hand, I was the only one at the table that did not directly have cash or land or resources to put into the equation but I did represent the interests of one of the main partners, Essex County Council who did have these things. Each and every person at the table was the sum of their respective organisations - something that really intrigued me in relation to the way we might see an artist as corporate or non-corporate (and I mean corporate in the old fashioned sense of the word). I was struck by this potential for power during a meeting in the West End with all the partners and the architects. During the break I was taken to one side a by a colleague from ECC who suggested that I consider my suggestions about the placement of the library a little more carefully because the architect might turn a suggestion into a recommendation that had weight because, it was suggested by the Lead Artist. Therefore I was afforded that power of association.

What was intellectually seductive at meetings was the degree of unconstrained abstract thinking that was employed in

engineering the financial, planning and governmental requirements to make something come into being. A performance of decision making that may take purchase or may not. So you have the systems but you add to them, you do not feel ethically constrained by their form. Something we try to teach students in the studio all the time, which is not to concern yourself with the ethics of a particular piece of work but that you may arrive at an ethical position you do not yet know the shape of. Neither should you be constrained by an image of ethics or morality. The actors at these meetings over-identified with the processes of market determinism: a collective, almost biological formulation and dramatic expression of capital. Markedly different from, as you say, arts meetings where an over accommodation can lead to a lack of clear decisiveness or radical change. I wished meetings with Commissioning Agencies working in the public realm had the same ability to discuss arrangements in abstract terms instead of constantly reinstating orthodoxies and to this end can be highly complicit without being critical.

What I've just said may seem horrific to the good liberals' ears and in the light of what kind of spaces are produced out of recent development projects. These processes whether they come under the recent banner of 'regeneration' or the current one of 'economic development' will continue to absorb attempts at either formal or structural change. I was continually asked by the arts people at ECC whether I'd been brought in to the process too

early and my reply was not early enough. For this reason a great deal of the work ended up being attempts to retrospectively change the processes at work. An almost impossible task. For example, a certain disfunctionalism arose out of the insane situation where selected developers arrive with their own architects rather than a developer partnering with regional organisations and jointly selecting an architect and separate landscape architect. I, along with councilors, recommended that developers work up the master plan and then divide up the buildings so that different mid-scale practices could compete for the design of these. This was taken on in principle but I suspect will be ameliorated by taking the public competition element out and using public tendering requirements to exclude the mid-scale practices that you and I might think of as being capable of designing the kinds of spaces that are not retail determined or even excessively celebratory of retail.

Added to this is the prohibitive arrangements for public access and rights of assembly for the public realm leased to developers - something I tried to engage with by tying the landscape design in with the re-placement of the existing sculpture collection (Moore, Hepworth, Brown etc) so that the contracts would be inseparable and end up instituting a checkerboard arrangement of spaces across the site, guarded by the sculptures. An attempt at copying the arrangement that the design of Palm Springs comes out of. When the question of selling off a proportion of the original Palm Springs

reservation came up the decision was made to divide up the land in to block sized, alternate parcels and then only sell off the alternate squares. This way no single developer could ever monopolise the space as the plots only join each other corner to corner. Leading to low-density development. Clever huh!

As a regeneration consultant charged with getting this thing through said at the start - this was not an architect led project - it is a mixed-use retail led development - and there you have the problem. It is driven by the citizen consumer not the sovereign citizen subject. Because of this the sheer scale of resources available to developers makes it often impossible for other partners to compete on the same terms and argue for the primacy of a life lived as opposed to a life spent or spending. The symmetry of this liberal argument will always be soft, unforceful and regulatory in comparison to a market determinism of late capitalism and retail architecture. Which is why we need to find a new way of living in this post-Fordist architecture. Out of sense of vanity one fantasises about making the Jimmy Stewart speech that will somehow make all the parties see the light and rise to their feet, clapping with a tear in their eye. But that's never gonna happen.

Confusion did arise as to whether or not I represented the residents' interests or my own desires and compulsions. Confusion amongst residents and I think with myself. The notion of 'residents' tends to easily translate into 'community' and 'community' can be a terrifying thing. One of Courbet's initial curatorial

Appendix

Archive

Archive

Artist practices, artworks and urban regeneration projects

As an additional resource for this discussion we have assembled an archive of projects that have informed our research. A selection of images from the archive was presented prior to our panel. This archive supplements and operates as outlining other possible contexts for our panel discussion.

Apollo Pavilion (1969 – 1970)
Victor Pasmore

Archive

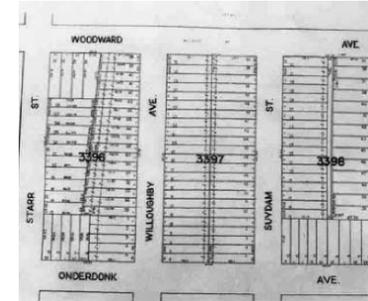


Apollo Pavilion, 1969 – 1970, Peterlee County Durham: public art piece consisting of geometric planes cast in concrete, the pavilion was intended as a central meeting place and a bridge between separate housing estates. The Apollo Pavilion is a public art piece which was the result of an attempt to synthesise art and architecture, designed by the artist Victor Pasmore having been appointed the role of consulting director of urban design. The concrete structure spans a manmade lake between two housing estates in the new town of Peterlee in County Durham and aimed to provide 'an architecture and sculpture of purely abstract form through which to walk, in which to linger and on which to play, a free and anonymous monument which, because of its independence, can lift the activity and psychology of

an urban housing community on to a universal plane.¹ Pasmore's involvement in the development of Peterlee amounts to an act of curation of the social realm and goes far beyond the designing and constructing of the art/architecture hybrid of the Pavilion. The 'Sunny Blunts' estate, a 300 acre site of housing, was developed by Pasmore in collaboration with two of the architects involved in the Peterlee project, the architectural design of the homes, the layout of the buildings and the landscaping of the area all became a realisation of Pasmore's constructivist paintings, the Pavilion being an integral part of the whole.

1 — <http://tinyurl.com/37d6544>

Archive Reality Properties: Fake Estates (1973-1974)
Gordon Matta-Clark



Reality Properties: Fake Estates, 1973-1974, Queens and Staten Island: documentation from the purchasing and visiting of gutterspace created by New York urban planning, includes photographs, deeds of sale, surveying data and plans In the early 1970s, Matta-Clark discovered that the City of New York periodically auctioned off "gutterspace" unusably small slivers of land sliced from the city grid through anomalies in surveying, zoning, and public-works expansion. He purchased fifteen of these lots, fourteen in Queens and one in Staten Island. Over the next years, he collected the maps, deeds, and other bureaucratic documentation attached to the slivers; photographed, spoke, and wrote about them; and considered using them as sites for his unique brand of "anarchitectural" intervention into urban space.¹

The Fake Estates project not only highlights the apparent power of the artist to transform the value of seemingly worthless pieces of real-estate but also raises questions regarding the logic of urban planning and the American dream of property ownership – the microparcells of land being created by lapses in the rationality of the work of the urban planner, pulling apart at the seams of the grid that is applied over the topology of the city space. In purchasing and documenting these spaces Matta-Clark draws attention to these lost areas of the city and reclaims them as art work; this act is further emphasised through Odd Lots, the Cabinet Magazine revisiting of the project, as a part of which bus tours explored the gutterspaces.

1 — Jeffrey Kastner, Odd Lots: [Revisiting Gordon Matta-Clark's Fake Estates](#), 2005, Cabinet

Tenantspin (1999) Superflex

Tenantspin, a Liverpool based community driven and internet-driven TV channel grew out of a 1999 urban regeneration project developed by Danish artist collective Superflex and Sean Treadway as a way for local residents of social tower blocks to regain a sense of coherent community and social connectivity.

At the time predominantly isolated inhabitants with little or no social interaction constituted these communities, the tenants were increasingly losing their physical common, as tower blocks were demolished in political pursuit for more contemporary approaches to social housing schemes.

As a way of addressing the contingent nature of the future community, Superflex targeted one tower block, Coronation Court, as the starting point and developed a situation example of their tool Superchannel -a theoretical forerunner for social media networks and a way of thinking through social networking as a radical democratic and self-organisational tool. Utilising these tools, "Tenantspin aims to promote resident participation in regeneration and social housing issues through constructive debate, the sharing of experiences and the encouragement of responsible free speech. [...] Tenantspin webcasts hour long shows once a week, looking at issues such as rent increases, resident participation and technology, landlords, demolition, the built environment, high rise living,



regeneration and beans on toast .¹" After initiating the project, Superflex abandoned it for the local tenants to take on its future development and usage, in which a criticism of the project has been the oblique promises of its political affect once –in spite of local opposition –Coronation Court was demolished. As an example of a process toward creating community, it has for the most part succeeded as it remains in use today and is still developed by the former tenants, now merging into more mainstream and universally available social networking tools. Tenantspin was Commissioned by FACT in partnership with Liverpool HAT the Arts Council of England's New Media Projects and Arts for Everyone Scheme, Danish Contemporary Art Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn Charitable Trust and Millennium Festival Fund.

¹ — Superflex: Coronation Court / Superchannel
www.superflex.net

Archive

Archive Coventry City Centre Master Plan (designed 2007 – 2008) Jerde Partnership



Coventry City Centre Master Plan, designed 2007 - 2008 for development over the next 15-20 years: The master plan design for the redevelopment of Coventry city centre has been developed by architecture and urban planning firm The Jerde Partnership.

'The Coventry City Centre Master Plan is envisioned to re-establish Coventry as a world-class city with a vibrant and integrated urban [sic]. The plan respects the history and character of Coventry and fits comfortably within the overall city framework, yet delivers a bold for the future [sic]. The master plan reimagines key areas within the city centre, creates needed new green spaces, combined a full mix of uses, and connects to other redevelopment [sic] within the city centre. It has been carefully planned in a sustainable way that supports the City's economic and social success. The plan results from a year-long collaboration with the City Council, developers, and other stakeholders. It incorporates the input of literally thousands of

comments from local citizens, creating a master plan that fits the desires of the community.¹

City centre regeneration schemes, such as that proposed for Coventry, whilst providing improved facilities and public spaces for the local community and creating greater economic opportunities and benefits, also ultimately often drastically alter the space they occupy. The projects of the Jerde Partnership in particular are an example of this complete architectural overhaul, a homogenised 'simulated urban experience', the creation and curation of new places. However, what do these 'placemaking' projects replace and displace?

¹ — <http://tinyurl.com/3xfsqhh>

Beirut – Les Quartier Des Artistes, Saifi Village (2004)
Solidere

Archive



Saifi Village is part of the reconstruction of downtown Beirut undertaken by the publicly traded company Solidere. With major investment by the Hariri family, Solidere has completely rebuilt areas of the city that had been decimated by the war by buying up property and then offering a share in the company to property owners. The reconstruction, claiming to recreate authentic Levantine neighborhoods, is a sort of Arab and European pastiche. This is a recognisable new architectural style in the region, especially in urban development projects in the Gulf. This area and others like it are now too expensive for previous owners and inhabitants and cater mostly to the elite and tourists, which may bring economic benefit but does not create community space, something that the developers seem to have been aware of. "If you look at Saifi Village, you'll see that it is a residential district with a traditional Levantine character and is designed to contain gardens, small squares, fountains and pedestrian and seating areas where, around every corner, there is something new to see", says Randa Armanazi, Public Relations Manager at Solidere whose

role also involves developing cultural and artistic projects that will attract visitors to the city centre. The idea to bring activity back into the downtown area and to create a kind of life there that is not available elsewhere, continues Armanazi, has been in the making for many years; and Saifi, with its quiet village-like atmosphere that makes one forget one is in the middle of bustling city, is the ideal location for an art quarter. "This is the one place in town to come to buy art where you can park your car and meander through the village and go from one gallery and specialist boutique to the next", explains Armanazi. "And here, rather than struggle on their own in isolated locations around the city, art dealers, designers and artists can all benefit from the specialist clientele that come to visit the area."¹

¹ — Nada Al Awar – Canvas – Volume 1 Issue 4, July/August 2005

Archive Trekroner Bridge, (2005)
Nils Norman



Nils Norman is an artist who crosses the disciplines of architecture and urban planning, and, in doing so, proposes subversive takes on how we live in urban environments, such as exploring the role of street furniture in everyday situations. His interventions both act to subvert established norms in urban planning and design, and are the drive behind their manifestation and inception. Norman is very much involved in urban regeneration projects, and attempts to tie up projective concerns with current political and social issues. Looking at how regeneration has a homogenising effect on public space, he looks at alternative modes, utopian experiments and activist tactics to create proposals for his own ideas about public space, architecture and art.

The 80m Trekroner Bridge, island and lake for the new town of Roskilde, Denmark, was a major design project for the Roskilde Commune completed in Denmark in 2005. This project involved collaboration between Norman and the town's urban planning department, who worked closely together, discussing various pragmatic aspects such as materials, and also in imagining a community that would grow up around the development.

His work thus straddles the divide between socially engaged practice and the direction and manipulation of the social realm itself, to comment, reflexively, on his own and others involvement in such projects in a second level of discourse. His seemingly utopian projects offer up a critique of existing structures and situations within our lived in and meticulously planned environments.

To achieve this, he both collaborates with, and infiltrates the practices and institutions of, architects, urban planners, local governments and developers. This collaboration is in part covert and subversive, he maintains his position as an artist through this and this offers him a position of supposed autonomy and critical distance, yet he adopts the language and methods of those he is laying a claim at critiquing. The central themes to Norman's work here are urban issues, the production of public space, its representation and its privatisation. It is a concern that calls into question how the spaces we live in are structured and how we may take for granted the power structures at work behind them.

Panacea (2005 -)

Michael Pinsky, Zoë Walker & Neil Bromwich

“Over the last decade, the change in arts funding has resulted in artists being increasingly expected to take on a role of social engineer by providing art that aims to improve society or the environment, adding to the economic value of an area.¹”

“The work that we make in the gallery is framed by the white cube, the work in the public realm is framed by the city or by the dynamics of society. It’s a tool that gets used shifting frames continually.²”

“[We must] consider the political and social implications of the move from arts in a medical setting, to arts in the wider social sphere ... Not only should we ask if the ‘mental health’ model ... is an effective way of dealing with pressing social problems, but we should be aware that it encourages a view among funders, providers and participants that the arts are only worthwhile when they make us feel physically or mentally better. When the arts are turned into a healing instrument, they may lose their capacity to shock, disturb, and challenge our worldview.³”

Panacea (2005 -) is an ongoing project by Michael Pinsky, Zoë Walker & Neil Bromwich exploring the potential for art to operate as a universal remedy for social, economical and political dilemmas. As a consequence of the normalised presence of art in contemporary culture, artists have increasingly become involved in many aspects of social politics. By ironically replicating the language of cultural policy that vigorously promotes the



therapeutic function of art as a tool for social regeneration, Panacea addresses the contradictions entrenched in institutional funding directives towards measurable outcomes to which artistic autonomy is subordinated. As a result, it mirrors the unrealistic expectations for art as cure-all, healing social wounds and improving life. Panacea explores the limits of optimistic messages of social harmony and aspirations of collective interaction by over-identifying with these propositions. At the same time playful and critical in its emphatic celebration of aesthetic wellbeing, it makes evident that the oversimplified solution of a universal formula for social problem-solving produces a sense of ambiguity, as it demonstrates the implausibility of such beneficial effects. Nevertheless, Panacea’s response to the idea of art as a catalyst for social improvement seems to leave open the possibility of change for better as long as the comfortable idea of a ‘cure for all ills’ is replaced by a reflection on the function, use and effect of art and the instrumentalisation of culture.

1 — Interview with Michael Stanley, Panacea, (2008) John Hansard Gallery, Southampton

2 — Ibid

3 — Munira Mirza (2006) Culture Vultures [Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?](#) Policy Exchange

Archive

Archive State Britain (2006)

Mark Wallinger at the Tate Britain

Mark Wallinger recreated peace campaigner Brian Haw’s Parliament Square protest for a dramatic installation at Tate Britain in 2006. Running along the full length of the Duveen Galleries, State Britain consisted of a meticulous reconstruction of over 600 weather-beaten banners, photographs, peace flags and messages from well-wishers that had been amassed by Haw over five years.

Faithful in every detail, each section of Brian Haw’s peace camp from the makeshift tarpaulin shelter and tea-making area to the profusion of hand-painted placards and teddy bears wearing peace-slogan t-shirts was painstakingly sourced and replicated for the display.

Brian Haw began his protest against the economic sanction in Iraq in June 2001, and has remained opposite the Palace of Westminster ever since. On 23 May 2006, following the passing by Parliament of the ‘Serious Organised Crime and Police Act’ prohibiting unauthorised demonstrations within a one kilometre radius of Parliament Square, the majority of Haw’s protest was removed. Taken literally, the edge of this exclusion zone bisects Tate Britain. Wallinger has marked a line on the floor of the galleries throughout the building, positioning State Britain half inside and half outside the border.

‘In bringing a reconstruction of Haw’s protest before curtailment back into the public domain, Wallinger raises challenging questions about issues of



freedom of expression and the erosion of civil liberties in Britain today ¹. State Britain also asks how we might navigate different systems of power and their properties. Is it possible to create or curate friction by juxtaposing systems of power in the way that we see here? The act of protest transfers a wider social power structure into the institution of the Tate Britain, which has its own structures of power, and weighty cultural capital. Where the act of protest is banned by law in one arena it is acceptable in another but perhaps takes a new form, conveys a new message and speaks to a new public. Protest becomes the subject matter rather than the action, but is, on the other hand, visible where it had previously been banished. By using this cultural cache to reinterpret and recontextualise the social, perhaps this could be how we attempt to curate friction, not just within the art institution but in the expanded field. The relative freedom that this cache brings within the context of governmental policy, for example, may just be an area for exploration, a space to critically navigate the contingencies of the social realm.

1 — <http://tinyurl.com/2hv2um>

Arcelor Mittal Orbit (2012)
Anish Kapoor



A vast steel piece of public art has been selected as an icon of the 2012 London Olympics: a 120 metre tall, spiralling, twisting tower, designed by Anish Kapoor and the structural engineer Cecil Balmond for the Olympic Park in Stratford, East London. Satisfying the Mayor of London's desire to match the Eiffel Tower, this structure is bigger than ever, standing 22 metres taller than the Statue of Liberty, made using approximately 1400 tons of steel and costing around £19.1 million to produce. Kapoor's Orbit – it is officially called ArcelorMittal Orbit, named after the company owned by steel magnate Lakshmi Mittal, who is contributing £16 million, and whose business is one of the 2012 Olympic sponsors – is part of an ambition to make the Olympic site a permanent visitor attraction. Since the arts and cultural sector in Britain became commercialised, there has been a question of compromise between creative value of the arts in society and the social impact of the arts within the instrumentalism of cultural



funding and policy. Munira Mirza, director of arts and culture policy of the Mayor of London, conveys her anxiety about close relationships between state and artist, which whilst artists and arts managers may speak the language of 'performance measurement', 'market share' and 'return on investment', they are more dependent than ever upon the state¹. What do art and cultural policy makers overlook in a tick-box culture of political bureaucracy? Is a 'post-games tourist attraction', boasting its grandiose dimension and a lasting role in the legacy of the Games, something more than an instrument by politicians which justifies the position of art in the public sphere? Are critical positions possible in this type of curation of the social?

1 — Munira Mirza (2006) *Culture Vultures* [Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?](#) Policy Exchange

Archive

Archive The Guggenheim Franchise:
Bilbao and Abu Dhabi



The Guggenheim Bilbao opened with great fanfare in Spain in 1997, a landmark cultural development project in the Basque region of Spain. The 'Guggenheim effect' is now a model for urban regeneration projects as it led to a tourism and construction boom in the former shipping town. Other museums are planned for Abu Dhabi, Las Vegas, Rio, Guadalajara, Taichung, Bucharest and Vilnius. While it draws in tourists, it is difficult to measure the impact on local cultural appreciation or engagement with the arts. Looking back at Bilbao after 10 years, a *New York Times* article reflects "It's as if Bilbao went on a shopping spree, commissioning a trophy case of starchitects and Pritzker Architecture Prize winners... Despite a host of tourist information centers, including a glass shed outside the Guggenheim staffed with professional guides and a rainbow of color brochures, Bilbao remains very much a one-attraction town."¹ Abu Dhabi, UAE – 450,000 square feet,

opening 2013 on Saadiyat Island – The Island of Happiness. With major institutions designed by some of the world's most renowned architects – Frank Gehry, Jean Nouvel, Norman Foster, Tadao Ando, and Zaha Hadid – Saadiyat Island will be an irresistible magnet attracting the world to Abu Dhabi². This is a major real estate project in the wealthiest and most conservative Emirate in the Gulf, which hopes to become a regional cultural capital. Concerns about the lack of infrastructure to support these institutions and the implications of censorship and cultural sensitivities remain unanswered.

1 — Denny Lee, *Bilbao, 10 Years Later*, *New York Times*, 23.09.2007

2 — <http://tinyurl.com/32hng3a>





Roman Vasseur



Dr Munira Mirza



Dr Andrea Phillips



Appendices

History Background & Acknowledgements

Biographies Bibliography & Resources

www.contingencyofcuration.org

History

Since 2008 Amanda Beech, Course Director MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice, Chelsea College of Art and Design, Jaspar Joseph-Lester, Module Leader, MA Contemporary Fine Art (Curating), Sheffield Hallam University, and Matthew Poole, Programme Director, Centre for Curatorial Studies, University of Essex have brought MA curating students together to produce a yearly project with interim events and a final 'outcome' - this has involved exhibition making, talks, and the publication Project Biennale, launched at the Venice Biennale 2009 with a review and press conference exhibition held at SIA Gallery Sheffield, June 10-11th 2009 (for full details please visit: www.projectbiennale.tk)

This cross-institutional partnership seeks to enhance learning through practice, discussion and collaboration. In bringing together three universities (SHU, UAL, UoE) the aim of the project is to allow students to be made aware of current academic research models and methodologies, to become familiar with how those activities can be manifest in professional practice in the public domain and how these practices can develop and enhance new modes of inquiry to the discipline of curatorial/fine art practice. By working towards this conference and a forthcoming publication - through a series of meetings, one night events, e-mail and weblog discussion and seminars - The Contingency of Curation seeks to demonstrate the value of learning and teaching collaboration and student-led projects to enhance approaches to both pedagogy and research.

Amanda Beech, Jaspar Joseph-Lester and Matthew Poole are already involved in Co-Directing the research group Curating Video (www.curatingvideo.com). This project, set up in 2005, supports ongoing connections in research and takes them to pedagogy, further enhancing research links and allowing staff to understand better how research and pedagogy can sit together in collegiate frameworks. Curating Video organised a conference at Tate Britain in November 2008 entitled 'Pleasure and Persuasion in Lens-based Media', launched a book of the same name (Artwords Press 2008), and also held the symposium 'Curating Video' at Chelsea College of Art in February, 2008. Prior to this, from 2004 onwards, Beech, Joseph-Lester and Poole had together

produced exhibitions of video and photography with the work of international artists in Hamburg, Leeds, London, Miami, Reno, and Tokyo, and organised panel discussions at conferences in the UK and abroad.

Understanding how other institutions create strong and creative learning environments is central to the ongoing project of Curating Video and this inter-collegiate MA curating student collaboration. Most significantly, it is through practically working together that we see this work as most useful to our students and our respective academic departments.

The aims of this cross-institutional partnership have sought to enhance learning through practice, discussion and collaboration allowing students to experience current academic research models and methodologies, to become familiar with how those activities can be manifest in professional practice in the public domain and how these practices can develop and enhance new modes of inquiry to the discipline of curatorial/fine art practice. By working towards a conference and publication - through a series of meetings, one-night events, e-mail and weblog discussion and seminars – The Contingency of Curation seeks to demonstrate the value of learning and teaching collaboration and student-led projects to enhance approaches to both pedagogy and research.

The Curating Courses

MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice
Chelsea College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London

This research-led Masters course offers a challenging theoretical curriculum focusing on current cultural debates, sustained through an emphasis on practice-based critique. It develops a self-reflective analysis of student curators' own practices, with understanding and debate of current cultural activities. A visiting lecturer programme, a series of contemporary aesthetics seminars as well as writing workshops, professional practice lectures and seminars all support the course.

Centre for Curatorial Studies
University of Essex

The Centre for Curatorial Studies (CCS) is a teaching and research centre within the Department of Art History & Theory at The University of Essex. CCS offers a range of degrees to suit a broad spectrum of career goals, from the new BA Art & Curatorial Practices to our five MA level degree courses, as well as MPhil and PhD level research programmes. All CCS degrees explore current and historical issues and case studies across the fields of museology, gallery studies, contemporary curatorial practice, and culture and heritage management.

MA Contemporary Fine Art (Curating)
Sheffield Hallam University

This course offers interdisciplinary opportunities creating an engaging professional experience covering all areas of the practice and theory of contemporary art. MACFA (Curating) recognises and responds to the expanded field of art through encouragement and support of curatorial projects developed in the context of fine art practice. Through debate about the relationship between art practice, current critical discourse and concepts of curating, the Curating Art elective helps students to develop a wide range of innovative and critical curatorial projects. The Department and student studios are located in the heart of Sheffield's Cultural Industries Quarter, where links include: Sheffield Contemporary Arts Forum, studios such as S1 and Bloc, Yorkshire Artspace Society, the Showroom Cinema, and Site Gallery.

Behind the Scenes

Amanda Beech is Course Director of the MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice at Chelsea College of Art and Design, London. Beech is also an artist and writer. Her work in various forms explores neo-liberalism and its critiques through an exploration of rhetoric, violence and concepts of the political. Recent exhibitions include 'Sanity Assassin', Spike Island, Bristol 2010, 'Statecraft', Harlow, Essex, 2008 (both solo), and 'Greetings Comrades, The image has now changed its Status', Ocular Lab., Melbourne, Australia, 2009. She is contributing editor of 'Sanity Assassin' (Urbanomic Press, 2010) and 'Episode: Pleasure and Persuasion in Lens-based Media', (Artwords Press, 2008).

Jaspar Joseph-Lester is Reader in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. Joseph-Lester also makes artworks, writes and collaborates on curatorial projects. His work explores the role that images play in determining urban planning, social space, and everyday praxis. Recent work has focused on the conflicting ideological frameworks embodied in architecture and urban planning. He has shown his work widely in the UK and abroad. He is author of 'Revisiting the Bonaventure Hotel' (Copy Press, 2009), and co-editor of 'Episode: Pleasure and Persuasion in Lens-based Media' (Artwords Press, 2008). www.jasparjosephlester.com

Matthew Poole is Programme Director of The Centre for Curatorial Studies in the Department of Art History & Theory at The University of Essex. He is also a freelance curator and writer and a co-founder and co-director of PILOT: international contemporary artists' & curators' forum and online archive (www.pilotlondon.org), co-director of Curating Video (www.curatingvideo.com), and director of the intercollegiate research group PoCA (The Political Currency of Art). Poole is currently working on a series of symposia, a special issue of JVAP (Journal of Visual Arts Practice), and an anthology all on the topic of 'Anti-Humanist Curating'.

Biographies:

Panel 1: The Autonomous Curator

Emma Dexter is Director of Exhibitions at Timothy Taylor Gallery, London. Prior to this Emma held a number of key posts at public galleries and museums in the UK, including: assistant curator of fine art at Stoke-on-Trent's City Museum and Art Gallery (1985 to 1987); from 1987-1990 Director of the Chisenhale Gallery, London; and, Deputy Director of Exhibitions at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) and Director of Exhibitions from 1992-1999. Before moving to Timothy Taylor Gallery, Emma was a Senior Curator at Tate Modern from 2000-2007.

Marie-Anne McQuay is Curator at Spike Island, Bristol. McQuay joined the organisation in January 2007, where she works across the Exhibition, Residency and Public Programmes and has initiated numerous exhibitions for the galleries at Spike Island, including Craig Mulholland's solo show *Grandes et Petites Machines* (2008) and *Working Things Out* (2007) a group show with new work by Milo Brennan, Richard Forster, Sara MacKillop, Sophie Macpherson, Haroon Mirza, Jonathan Owen and Andy Wake. She also co-ordinates the Associate Programme - a network of artists, curators and writers based in the city which launched in March 2007 and now has over 80 members. Previously Marie-Anne worked at FACT (Foundation for Art & Creative Technology), Liverpool, developing collaborative commissions with artists that include Nick Crowe, Kristin Lucas and Dias & Riedweg before undertaking a Masters in Curating at Goldsmiths. She also maintains an independent practice as a writer and is currently Guest Editor of *Leisure Centre*.

Emily Pethwick is Director of The Showroom gallery, London. From 2005-2008 she was the director of Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory, in Utrecht, The Netherlands. From 2003-2004 she was curator at Cubitt, London. She has contributed to numerous catalogues and magazines, including *Frieze*, *dot dot dot*, *GAS*, *texte zur kunst*, *Artforum* and *Untitled*, edited books, such as 'Casco Issues X: The Great Method', with Peio Aguirre, and 'Casco Issues XI' with Marina Vishmidt and Tanja Widmann.

Panel 2: Mediation as Production - Collaboration, Authorship and Contingency

Richard Brikett is Assistant Curator at the ICA, London. In 2008 he curated *Nought to Sixty*, a six-month series of exhibitions and events with sixty emerging artists from Britain and Ireland. In 2009 he co-curated *Talk Show* - a season of artworks, residencies, performances and talks centred around the theme of speech. Most recently he curated a festival of music and sound for the ICA titled *Calling Out of Context*.

Sound Threshold was established in 2007 by Daniela Cascella and Lucia Farinati, as a long-term research project that explores the relations between site, sound and text. The project is grounded on a shared background in literature, experimental music, art history, and on over a decade of experience in writing and in curating visual and sonic arts projects. Since its inception, Sound Threshold has developed a programme of events, talks and artists' commissions in collaboration with international organisations. www.soundthreshold.org

Simon Hollington and Kypros Kyprianou are London based artists that have been working together since 1999. They work in a wide range of media, particularly video and installation. The social and political implications of manned flight in the twentieth century were the subject of *Goodbye Vile Earth! SHP* (2008). The trope of 'when science goes wrong' in *The Invisible Force Field Experiments*, *Artsway*, 2003, was extended for lovers of conspiracy theory as *The Invisible Force Field Experiments Accident Report*, ICA, London and *Mop Projects*, Sydney, 2005, and *New Forest Pavilion*, Venice Biennale, 2005. *The Nightwatchman*, *Arts Catalyst/Scan*, London, 2008, charted the changing public perceptions of the nuclear power industry. <http://www.electronicssunset.org/>

Neil Webb is a practising artist based in Sheffield working predominantly with sound. His practice includes sound installation, video, performance, curation, CD releases under the name *bocman*, and he is a founder member of *Host Artists Group*. In 2007 the making of a multi-channel audiovisual installation in collaboration with Ron Wright titled *The Breach* and the making of the multi-channel sound installation *The Stars in Us All*, *Bloc Space*, Sheffield. In 2008 Webb was commissioned to create a new audio installation in Sheffield's *Winter Gardens*. Titled *Adrift* this was part of the city-wide event *Sheffield 08 Yes, No Other Options*.

<http://www.neilwebb.com>

Ron Wright is a sound designer for screen and gallery. His film work includes the feature films *Jelly Dolly* and *Exhibit A* which both won international awards. His sound art practice includes *Hyllo*, a series of "sci-art" audio-visual collaborations with lens based artist Andy Eccleston comprising of; *Requiem*, featuring a French horn being dissolved in a clear tank of nitric acid; *Acousma*, a quasi-paranormal opera generated from MRI brain scans and *Spindrift*, which uses boroscope technology to journey through the inside of orchestral instruments. Wright's sonic research is concerned with sound in relation to space exploring real and imagined landscapes. <http://www.ronwright.org>

Panel 3: Curating Friction – Between Complicity and Contingency

Dr Andrea Phillips is Reader in Fine Art at the Department of Art, Goldsmiths, College. From 2006-2009 she was Director of *Curating Architecture*, a think tank that investigated the aesthetic and political relationship between architecture, curating and concepts of public display (www.gold.ac.uk/visual-art/curating-architecture). Dr Phillips publishes widely in art and architecture journals, artist's monographs and collections on politics, philosophy and contemporary art practice, and speaks internationally on art, architecture, politics, institution-making and urban regeneration. Current research projects include *Building Democracy*, a set of publications and discussions that forefront critiques of participation in contemporary art and architecture.

Dr Munira Mirza advises the Mayor of London on strategy for Arts and Culture focusing on the Cultural Olympiad and 2012, arts and music education, supporting the cultural sector through the recession, and greater access to culture for all Londoners. She has worked for the Royal Society of Arts, Policy Exchange and Tate and taught at the University of Kent and University of East London. She has edited *Culture Vultures: Is UK arts policy damaging the arts?* and co-authored the report *Living Apart Together: British Muslims and the Paradox of Multiculturalism*. She was a founding member of the *Manifesto Club*. Dr Mirza is a member of Arts Council England, London Regional Council, MLA London, and the Renaissance London Board.

Roman Vasseur is an artist and is currently part time Senior Lecturer in the School of Fine Art, Kingston University. Vasseur's works and provocations often re-perform epic, filmic, and political narratives via specific socio-economic realities. The works redeploy 'culture' as a contingent component of the grand narratives of democracy, for example advocating the ritualized death of a mural artist as an alternative to the use of 'art' in urban regeneration. Vasseur has exhibited at the ICA, EAST International 06, and Die Neue Aktionsgalerie, Berlin. He has recently completed a two-year role as Lead Artist for Harlow New Town.

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For further information and additional bibliography:

<http://www.contingencyofcuration.org>

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the following people, without whom this project would not have been possible.

Conference Guest Speakers: Emma Dexter, Simon Hollington and Kypros Kyprianou, Marie-Anne McQuay, Munira Mirza, Emily Pethwick, Andrea Phillips, Sound Threshold - Daniela Cascella and Lucia Farinati, Roman Vasseur, Neil Webb, and Ron Wright. Plus, live subtitling stenography by John Boulton, SYS Media, and Andy Nicholls and the team at Red Bee Media.

Galleries: Victoria Walsh (Tate Britain), Eleanor Clayton (Tate Britain), Site Gallery Sheffield, and Clare Mitten (Wimbledon Gallery).

Students:

MA CRITICAL WRITING CURATORIAL PRACTICE 2009-2010

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Robert Cliff, Emily Gee, Daeun Jeong, Thomas Ulrik Madsen,

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MA GALLERY STUDIES, CENTRE FOR CURATORIAL STUDIES 2009-2010

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Sheffield Hallam University

Mark Batty, Jade Downes, Lou Hazelwood, Jim Howieson, Sarah Lovell,

Deborah Pullan

Graphic identity:

Oliver Klimpel at Büro International London.

Sponsors: The Contingency of Curation has been made possible with generous support from Chelsea College of Art & Design, the Department of Art History & Theory at The University of Essex, the Department of Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University, Halifax Bank (Sheffield City Centre), and A. J. Kent & Co Specialist Painting Services.

Colophon

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First published 2010 by
MA Critical Writing Curatorial Practice (Chelsea College of Art and Design)
Centre for Curatorial Studies (University of Essex)
MA Contemporary Fine Art (Curating) (Sheffield Hallam University)

www.contingencyofcuration.org

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

Graphic identity by Oliver Klimpel at Büro International London.

www.buointernational.co.uk

Printed and bound in Great Britain.

