

CURATORS: MORE OR LESS SUBJECTS
SPECTATORSHIP, PASSIVITY, AND FABULATION

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Declaration of Authorship

I hereby declare that all the material in this thesis is my own work.

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified, and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Vanessa Desclaux', with a stylized, elongated flourish extending to the right.

Vanessa Desclaux

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Abstract

My research intends to critically expose the political, economic, and ethical conditions in which curatorial practice is operating in the current context. I attempt to examine the question of authorship within curatorial practice, in order to challenge the distinction between an administrative, scholarly practice carried out in the name of an institution and an authorial and entrepreneurial practice that is exemplary of late capitalism. I thus intend to challenge the figure of the curator that has been disciplined by and is expected to function within current political and economic conditions. I will endeavour to disrupt the stable roles and functions associated with the figure of the curator and instead uncover multiple subject positions, which collapse professional templates and fail traditional oppositions between activity and passivity.

I therefore begin with a reflection on the condition of spectatorship inherent to curatorial practice, and propose that the curator is the quintessential spectator. This is outlined in order to dispute the ideological deadlock regarding spectatorship and to address fundamental notions of vision and attention within curatorial practice. I will then propose to re-evaluate the notion of passivity in order to question assumptions regarding power and activity, putting forward examples that show the paradoxical qualities that passivity encompasses in the context of curatorial practice. Spectatorship and passivity fundamentally contribute to reconfiguring the possibility for a different approach to the production of subjectivity within and through curatorial practice. Through the notion of fabulation I finally intend to redefine the production of subjectivity in the context of curatorial practice. Fabulation stages an inquiry into the differentiation between artistic and curatorial practices: not to erase differences or flatten out competencies but to rather affirm a different distribution of positions, and inhabit a multiplicity of figures.

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INTRODUCTION

My doctoral project has emerged in context with my working experience: while I was fulfilling the function of assistant curator at Tate Modern, where I worked from 2006 to 2009, I felt the urge to find a context within which I could reflect on some of the artistic practices that I encountered in my curatorial practice. I was referring to artists such as Guy de Cointet, David Lamelas, Allen Ruppersberg, and Matt Mullican because they confronted my own position as a curator with a series of problems, which proved to be positively challenging. These artists, their works, the way they positioned themselves in relation to exhibition making, and the way they made use of language, discourse and narration, forced me to consider anew what my role, my function, and my value as a curator could be. My initial ideas for this project were difficult to hold on: it took a substantial amount of time to distinguish between the artistic practices that stimulated my curatorial work and the questions and claims that could allow me to develop a PhD thesis. The work I carried out in relation to the performances under hypnosis of Matt Mullican — which I will introduce in the second chapter of this thesis — was crucial in this regard, inaugurating a long period of curatorial work, and unlocking a flow of questions that eased my way into the early stages of writing this thesis.

The concern with the value assigned to curatorial practice appeared at first as having importance to my project for revealing a personal and psychological concern that had to do with one's idea of vocation, of being socially and politically useful, which I believe reflects the significance of care to the function of the curator. But it also exposed an economic concern: questioning one's value in relation to one's profession has to do with the necessity of sustaining one's activity and mode of earning a living in a fiercely competitive context. The prominent challenge was to find a way to deal with the affective charge involved in my curatorial work and, more particularly, in my engagement in this doctoral project.

Acknowledging the affective dimension of curatorial practice may seem banal: most curators would say that the decision to work and to keep working in such a sphere is driven by affects such as passion, pleasure, or admiration. Yet, the affective dimension of labour has also been brought forward as an important claim in academic contexts in order to describe, more generally, some fundamental changes in relation to people's relationship to work in the development of late capitalism. Thus I was facing the problem of an affective dimension in

my practice that seemed, on the one hand, naive and ordinary but, on the other hand, evoked substantial academic claims. The project thus set out to deal with the conditions under which curatorial practice is possible today.

My research intends to demonstrate that the discursive practice that we designate as ‘curatorial practice’ has changed considerably since the 1980s. Following my reading of Michel Foucault, I try to consider curatorial practice as an ensemble of discourses, of institutions, of subjects, of knowledges, and of forces exerting power. My work demonstrates that the terms of curatorial practice, and of curator, are linguistic fictions as well as very real, existing people and effectual actions. These terms uncover complexities, contradictions, disagreements, and contestations. Nevertheless, one of the claims that I intend to put forward is that, despite these complexities and contestations, the political and economic conditions within which curatorial practice can exist in the present time reveal modes of disciplining, of normalization, and thus limitations that narrow down the field of possibilities: assigning places, disciplining roles, and determining rules of conduct. I did not want to condemn certain forms of practice in order to make space for others. My desire was to insert myself and produce forms of interference and interruption, a form of stuttering in a field of relationships and interactions in which the forces at work increasingly appear unbalanced.¹ I claim that the conditions under which curatorial practice operate today are determined by the neo-liberal condition, generating a unique form of governance that has gradually affected all the realms of life.

I do not understand the ‘neo-liberal condition’ as a homogeneous economic and political ideology and I acknowledge neo-liberalism as a complex, and sometimes contested, concept. My understanding of the notion of neo-liberalism is rooted in the work of Michel Foucault in the context of his lectures on *The Birth of Biopolitics* presented at the Collège de France in 1978 and 1979. In these lectures, Foucault proposes to look at two distinct historical perspectives in regard to the deployment of a neo-liberal rhetoric: on the one hand, he examines the ordo-liberal doctrine that emerges in the context of the German Federal Republic in the aftermath of the Second World War; on the other hand, he considers the theoretical propositions of the Chicago School of Economics which exerted an essential

¹ The concept of ‘stutter’ has played an important role in my curatorial practice, departing from the exhibition titled ‘Stutter’ that I co-curated with Nicholas Cullinan at Tate Modern in 2009. Since 2009, I have pursued the project under the title ‘A stuttering exhibition’, which took the form of a lecture (King’s College, 2010; CRAC Alsace, 2014) and a published script (magazine *Zivot*, 2010).

influence on the ideological construction of a political economy from the 1950s onward. Foucault anchors his historical analysis of the development of both ideologies and practices in a broader historical and conceptual framework regarding the connection between the rationality on which the action of the State is founded and the construction of a political economy². Foucault's critical project takes as an object of research what he designates as an "art of government"³:

Inasmuch as the government of men is a practice which is not imposed by those who govern on those who are governed, but a practice that fixes the definition and respective positions of the governed and governors facing each other and in relation to each other ...⁴

In his lectures, he argues that a series of fundamental principles regarding the government of men appear with the emergence of liberalism in the eighteenth century. He particularly insists on a crucial transformation regarding the notion of limitation of governmental reason. Such limitations were previously external to the State, found in moral and religious principles for example; yet these limitations become internal to the State through the construction of liberalism. Foucault stresses that the good government no longer refers to a notion of fairness but rather to a notion of truth.

So, with political economy we enter an age whose principle could be this: A government is never sufficiently aware that it always risks governing too much, or, a government never knows too well how to govern just enough. The principle of maximum/minimum replaces the notion of equitable equilibrium, of "equitable justice" that previously organized the prince's wisdom.⁵

For Foucault, political economy is neither a model of government, nor an economic model, but it rather reveals a specific place of formation of truth, which is the market, and the impact of such a regime of truth on governmental practices.

² "Sometimes this expression aims at a particular strict and limited analysis of the production and circulation of wealth. But, in a broader and more practical sense, "political economy" also refers to any method of government that can procure the nation's prosperity. And finally, political economy — the term employed by Rousseau in his famous article in the *Encyclopedie* — is a sort of general reflection on the organization, distribution, and limitation of powers in a society. I think that fundamentally it was political economy that made it possible to ensure the self-limitation of governmental reason." Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*. Lectures at College de France, Palgrave Millan, translated by Graham Burchell, 2008, 13

³ "I would like first to determine the way in which the domain of the practice of government, with its different objects, general roles, and overall objectives, was established so as to govern in the best possible way. In short, we could call this the study of the rationalization of governmental practice in the exercise of political sovereignty." *Ibid.*, 2

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12

⁵ *Ibid.*, 17

When I say regime of truth I do not mean that at this moment politics or the art of government finally becomes rational. I do not mean that at this moment a sort of epistemological threshold is reached on the basis of which the art of government could become scientific. I mean that the moment I am presently trying to indicate is marked by the articulation of a particular type of discourse and a set of practices, a discourse that, on the one hand, constitutes these practices as a set bound together by an intelligible connection and, on the other hand, legislates and can legislate on these practices in terms of true and false.⁶

Through his lectures, Foucault examines further transformations in the connection between political economy and governmental reason that characterize the emergence of a neoliberal governmentality. American political theorist Wendy Brown picks up on Foucault's analysis and attempts to prolong it in the present context. In her own definition of governmentality, Brown reiterates essential aspects of Foucault's definition and builds on the extension of a market rationality to all dimensions of the social field, including areas such as education or culture.

I want to consider the way that this rationality is emerging as governmentality – a mode of governance encompassing but not limited to the State, and one which produces subjects, forms of citizenship and behaviour, and a new organization of the social.⁷

Brown's analysis attempts to demonstrate that neo-liberalism has a specifically political register, underlining "its powerful erosion of liberal democratic institutions and practices in places like the US".⁸ For Brown, democracy has been weakened because "the relative autonomy of certain institutions from one another and from the market – law, elections, the police, the public sphere – an independence that formerly sustained an interval and a tension between a capitalist political economy and liberal democratic political sphere"⁹ has been undermined.

She further adds:

Neoliberalism does not simply assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to such calculus, rather it develops institutional practices and

⁶ *Ibid.*, 18

⁷ Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy", in *Theory & Event, Volume 7, Issue 1*, 2003. URL: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/48659> DOI: 10.1353/tae.2003.0020. Last accessed 12 June 2016

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

rewards for enacting this vision.¹⁰

Brown affirms that neo-liberalism “figures individuals as rational, calculating creatures whose moral autonomy is measured by their capacity for “self-care” – the ability to provide for their own needs and service their own ambitions”.¹¹ Brown thus emphasizes an essential trait of neo-liberal governmentality, which relies on granting more autonomy to private institutions and individuals, thus transferring some of the responsibilities traditionally pertaining to the State.

French political theorist Emilie Hache has specifically explored this dimension of neo-liberalism, which she defines as a “new way of thinking and doing”¹² that produces a particular attachment from the perspective of many individuals.

Making the relationship of dependence to the Welfare State undesirable will consist in gradually associating redistribution and care, and in identifying the one who receives social benefits as needy.¹³

Hache emphasizes the perverse way through which neo-liberal rhetoric has come to appropriate and transform the signification of notions such as “responsibility”, “empowerment” and “self-transformation”, emptying these terms of their critical potential, particularly in the context of feminism. Hache writes:

Such a rationality does not presuppose that individuals are “responsible”, but that individuals *can* and *should* be, which, as we understand, is not that (or necessarily) generous or emancipatory, but is rather the expression of a demand of a certain behavior bound to material and social conditions, inexistent and unreachable for many.¹⁴

Hache thus stresses the necessity to resist to such neo-liberal use of these terms and to produce counter-behaviours¹⁵. In the framework of my project, I am particularly attentive to the claims regarding the significance of neo-liberalism in the broader sphere of subject formation, asserting that the neo-liberal condition privileges the perspective of the individual,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Emilie Hache, “La responsabilité, une technique de gouvernementalité néolibérale ?”, *Raisons politiques* 2007/4 (n° 28), 49 – 65. DOI 10.3917/rai.028.0049. Last accessed 17 June 2016, my translation.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 52

Hache quotes Foucault: “It involves an individualization of social policy and individualization through social policy, instead of collectivization and socialization by and in social policy.” Michel Foucault, *op.cit.*, 144.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 63

¹⁵ In the context of my research on curatorial practice, Hache’s remarks regarding the misappropriation of such terms are very relevant, particularly in relation to my attempt to reclaim terms such as “mystique” or “passivity”.

giving priority to individual freedom and his or her right to private property, valuing people who are able to access the markets and can function as competent actors within them, prizing entrepreneurship, flexibility and mobility, and considering that individuals are solely responsible for their choices. Such a transfer of responsibility to individuals has had a direct impact on artistic and curatorial practices if one considers the constant movement of precarization that we are witnessing in these fields. Within public institutions such as museums or art centres, curators are increasingly pressured to produce exhibitions that will attract greater number of visitors, thus measuring the quality of the artistic programme on the basis of a quantitative mode of calculation; curators are also asked to diversify sources of funding and find ways of bringing private funds in order to compensate the loss of public support. The appraisal of autonomy and entrepreneurship in neo-liberal rhetoric also finds direct correlation in the increasing number of independent curators who move from project to project, and often from one country to another, circulating freely between public and private spheres, cumulating different tasks and competencies.

The critical dimension of my position in regards to the consequences of the neo-liberal condition upon the transformation of curatorial practice, takes as a point of reference Foucault's definition of critique: 'how not to be governed like that, by that, in the name of those principles, with such and such an objective in mind and by means of such procedures, not like that, not for that, not by them'.¹⁶ The urgency I thus felt to critically position myself in relation to the current conditions under which curatorial practice operates was paired with a similarly important urgency to find a way to continue inhabiting curatorial practice, and pursue my desire to work with artistic practices. Throughout the thesis, I have attempted to read and write through theorists whose work was driven by revolt and dissidence as well as inhabitation and belief. The work of Michel de Certeau has been crucial in that regard, introducing me to the concept of 'the mystic', which he largely contributed to by defining it beyond restrictive disciplinary frameworks. Through the prism of Certeau's approach, mystic thought — of which Foucault says was probably 'the first great form of revolt in the west'¹⁷ — appeared as an example of discursive practice that demonstrated its capacity to resist normalizing and disciplining modes of subjection, and function as a model with which to associate the form of discursivity that I envisioned for curatorial practice. I hope to

¹⁶ Michel Foucault, 'What is critique?', in *The Politics of Truth*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 44.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

demonstrate that my in-depth reading of Certeau in the context of my enquiry into curatorial practice has allowed me to explore Certalian concepts such as vision, belief, enunciation, fable, possession, dispossession, and alterity, and to use them within the framework of my own project in order to expand the existing discursive structure in which curatorial practice is currently discussed. The work of Certeau is a complex entanglement between the rigour of scientific research and the passion and admiration that fuelled his theological and literary fascination for the work of the mystics. In my thesis, certain aspects of these relationships, traditionally seen as irreconcilable positions, will be discussed, specifically examining what happens when forms of intimacy and affection appear in the relationship between the historian, the theorist, or that of the curator, and their object of study. As I read Certeau, the notions of distance and proximity used to describe the relationship between God and its worshippers, between normality and possession or madness, between the historian and his object of study, and between the curator and the artist, began to collapse. I chose to work with this collapse of oppositions to overcome the problems posed by critique and in order to engage in a form of inhabitation: opening up a space in thought, in language, and in practice that would not be delimited by these confrontations, a space that would be more inclusive than exclusive. Certeau's thoughtful enquiry into his own role as historian, and more specifically his relationship to his objects of study, also extends on recent attempts at questioning the function of the curator or of the theorist, to which my own project is also indebted to.¹⁸

In a different way, my reading of Foucault's writing on literature and his query of the status of his writing, questioning the distinction between a language that he designates as 'primary' and a language that is 'secondary', which 'talks about literature, and that we ordinarily designate as critical', played a significant role.¹⁹ Foucault engaged with a question that seems as important for curatorial practice as it is for literary criticism, reflecting on a form of duplication or doubling, through language, of the work of another, that is of the writer, or the artist. Foucault disagreed with the notion of a 'metalanguage' but was rather interested in the concepts of repetition and of doubling, envisioning a 'spatiality' proper to literary works — which we might extend to a broader range of artistic practices — that other acts of writing could bring forward. Although Foucault did not specifically consider curatorial practice — he

¹⁸ I specifically think of Irit Rogoff's essay titled 'What is a theorist?', in *The State of Art Criticism*, ed. Elkins and Newman (New York: Routledge, 2007), 97 – 109.

¹⁹ Michel Foucault, *La Grande Étrangère. A propos de littérature*, ed. Philippe Artières, Jean-François Bert, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville and Judith Revel (Paris: les éditions de l'EHESS, 2013), 107. (Translation is mine)

never evoked the work of curators — the discussion he initiated has informed the direction that my project has taken: he contested the dichotomy between artistic creation and (the multiple forms of) commentary, interpretation, and presentation that work with, within, from, and against art, and thus allowed other thinkers after him to explore anew the field of possibilities that emerges in the gap between these practices and their complex relationships.

Through the title that I have given to my thesis I have chosen to place particular emphasis on the figure of the curator rather than on curatorial practice. This reflects the significance of my position as a practitioner: I could not position myself at a distance from my research questions; I had to rather deal with the fact that I was embedded in them on a personal level, and to find a way to translate this position academically in the context of my writing. My reading of Foucault and Certeau in the first steps of my project led me to distinguish inhabitation from a simplistic notion of the personal. I will demonstrate that envisioning my doctoral project through the concept of inhabitation has required putting into question concepts of subject, of self, and of identity entirely; giving them a central position in my project, tirelessly finding ways to undo their restricted definitions and interfering in the disciplined discourses that were built around them. This is also why the term ‘subject’ constitutes the other significant term in the title of my thesis. The main part of the title ‘Curators: more or less subjects’ is intended to provocatively doubt the association between the terms ‘curator’ and ‘subject’. Distrusting the certainty that the figure of the curator should be considered as a subject can be interpreted in different ways, depending on how one defines what ‘subject’ is or means. My intention was to allow such a polysemy to be integral to the title. If one considers ‘subject’ in its relation to ‘object’, then stating that curators are more or less subjects might suggest that they fall on the side of the object, of being instructed by others, subjected to their rules and codes, and inviting concepts of passivity and of dispossession. If one considers ‘subject’ in the sense of normalized and disciplined behaviour, then stating that curators are more or less subjects may allude to forms of resistance and of dissidence in relation to the modes of subjection imposed upon them.

In my use of the term ‘the figure of the curator’, the word ‘figure’ introduces the curator in the framework of representation. The figure of the curator functions as a substitute of something that is absent and presents it as such. By using the term figure, I wish to insist on the act of exhibiting, and presenting something. Through the use of this specific term, I refer to the writing of French art historian Louis Marin, and his research that took pictorial

representation as an object of theoretical examination. The figure of the curator becomes visible thanks to the dispositif of representation, which consists, for Marin, of background, foreground, and frame. The use of the singular — the figure — is suggestive here of the central significance placed on constructing a unique model, that is, a unique representation, to assert the power of the subject: The symbolic power of the curator as an actor in the art world relies on the visibility of its representation as a figure. In my doctoral project, I depart from a description of the figure of the curator currently available. Over the course of the writing I deny the existence of such a unique figure: I deconstruct, disperse such a unique model, I let it fade away in order to deny the very possibility of a model, in favour of a multitude of forms of subjectivity, of action, and of production. Thus, I do not deny the visibility of curators but I envision visibility as a field of possibilities and contradictions.

My thesis is organised into four main chapters. In chapter one, the first section consists of two parts, reflecting the twofold dimension of an examination investigating both my working experience, focused on the context of Tate Modern, and a large ensemble of textual contributions taking curatorial practice as an object of study. The second section makes a fundamental claim regarding the importance of spectatorship in the context of curatorial practice, proposing to examine the figure of the curator in light of its position as a spectator. Chapter two as a whole is dedicated to an exploration of the concept of passivity from a multiplicity of perspectives, intending to demonstrate its relevance for my enquiry. The first section of this second chapter focuses on the practice of hypnosis, which was pivotal to the concept of passivity that has emerged in the context of my curatorial work, and which has led to my formation of curatorial passivity. The second section of this chapter brings forward the problematics with the task of caring in the context of curatorial practice and discusses the significance of ethics in forms of practice that deal with the work of others, more specifically curatorial practice. Chapter three affirms the terms under which the project wishes to reposition curatorial practice and the figure of the curator, using concepts of enunciation, fabulation, and inhabitation to conceive of the concern with action and the production of subjectivity differently. Finally, chapter four, which has been written following the viva examination, considers the transformations of my curatorial practice in the context of an academic practice, engaging with the specific event conceived with four artists as a presentation of my practice within the framework of its academic examination.

In writing this thesis, which is one element of a twofold project anchored in my curatorial practice, I faced the challenge of working across two distinct registers. On the one hand, I take a personal stance, reflecting on my own experience and perspective, and claiming the importance of an experiential register that grants considerable significance to my embodied presence, affective experiences, and emotions. On the other hand, I explore a more removed perspective, working through other people experiences and practices, often using textual statements as material for the development of my own arguments and claims. I have been particularly drawn to forms of enunciation and of narration that offer accounts from experience. The register of narration has therefore played a significant role alongside the register of the experiential, leading me to engage with the question of experience within narrative contexts: fabulation certainly emerged out of this specific framework. I support my claims by calling on a great variety of positions and practices, among them philosophers, historians, and theorists coming from different disciplines, along with artists, and other curators. I have tried to clearly expose my relationship to these different practices, specifically when I am tied to them through more personal bounds. I hope that the diversity of this methodological approach will prove relevant to my project and will not confuse the reader. The methodology having been gradually asserted to mobilize such a multiplicity of perspectives intends to affirm a will to plasticity and a discontinuous mode of practice, declaring its refusal to be assigned to one identity, one place, and one register of action. I hope that this thesis can contribute to the necessary *undisciplining* of curatorial practice in the academic and professional contexts concerned with it. I want this work to bring forward the multiple registers of experience that underlie the condition of spectatorship, and to grant a central position to spectatorship within the framework of curatorial practice. I hope that one of the key contributions of this thesis will be a mobilization of passivity as a concept, as a state of being, which might pave the way for transformed modes of enunciation, and of action, allowing curators to foresee a plurality of modes of operating within curatorial practice, letting their practice expand beyond the verbal and material limitations assigned by such or such professional and economic model. I hope curators might envision how a different form of disposition in curatorial practice could also transform their inhabitation of the world.

CHAPTER I — THE FIGURE OF THE CURATOR: A VISIONARY SPECTATOR?

At the centre of my doctoral project lies the desire to investigate and deconstruct the fiction of the figure of the curator. I assert that there are crucial aesthetic and political issues at stake within the ceaseless building and transformation of this fiction. The project departs from an attempt to remove consensual definitions of curatorial practice and bring to the fore absences, complexities, and contestations within the current discussions that recognize the curatorial as a central locus of artistic production and knowledge production as well as a new object of study. In this first chapter, I will attempt to argue that the figure of the curator emerges in the framework of two distinct paradigms: on the one hand, the curator is considered as the hand of the institution and both benefit from an expertise — whether this expertise is considered as historical, dramaturgic, or managerial — that is put in the service of the institution and its different constituencies; and on the other hand, the curator is considered as enjoying an autonomous position, which is not secondary to the position of the artist, or the institution, but affirms his or her capacity of a primary production, which is authorial and might be assimilated as artistic production. I will attempt to argue that curatorial practice appears as a site of conflict and dissent within the broader and heterogeneous field of the art world,²⁰ as well as within individual institutions, whether public or private, big or small. I will try to claim that in the context of the discussions that have taken the figure of the curator as an object/subject of discourse, the relationship between curatorial practice and the notion of subject has been hardly discussed: even when the curator is considered as the hand of the artist or that of the institution, the affirmation that he or she is a subject is rarely doubted. Therefore, I will attempt to consider the figure of the curator as a spectator in an effort to contest the distance that separates the figure of the curator from the figure of the spectator, a distance that places the curator in a position of authority, embodying knowledge, power and expertise, before the individual spectator or the mass audience. Rethinking the figure of the curator through spectatorship will allow me to imagine a different regime of action, invested

²⁰ My use of the term ‘art world’ echoes the sociological examination led by Howard S. Becker in *Art worlds* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982). In his review of the book, Michael S. Kimmel writes: ‘The art world, then, is the universe of artistic production. It sets standards, determines aesthetic values, organizes production, distribution, and consumption.’ Michael S. Kimmel, ‘Review’, *American Journal of Sociology* 89, no. 3 (November 1983): 733 – 735.

in notions of vision, contemplation, observation, dispossession, and belief.

Section I.1 — Subject of discourse and subject being discoursed: Available models of the curator's role and function in the present time

In this first section, I will demonstrate that the figure of the curator emerges across two main paradigms: on the one hand, the curator fulfils a function in the service of another subject — the artist or the institution. In the context of this function, his or her authority might be founded on a variety of skills and competencies. On the other hand, the curator embodies a position of autonomy, following the model of the author of his or her work or of the cultural entrepreneur whose allegiances are multiple and temporary, working project after project. I will try here to enquire into these available models that produce the complex and contested figure of the curator in the present time. I will depart from my personal working experience at Tate Modern, considering this institution as an exemplary site through which the professional templates that are available to the figure of the curator reveal the complexities and contestations that determine the practice of curating. In regards to the foregrounding of my experience at Tate Modern, Catherine Wood plays a central role: I principally worked alongside her in the context of Tate Modern Live programme, and, moreover, her perspective as a curator and as a writer has strongly informed specific positions and claims within this thesis. I will then attempt to provide a broader perspective on the plurality of discourses — emerging from professional and academic contexts — that have contributed to describe, analyse, and define the figure of the curator and the field of curatorial practice since the 1980s. This initial section therefore constitutes a kind of double matrix, bringing together two very different perspectives: on the one hand, I depart from the perspective of the working environment, and more specifically my own experience, which I expand through the perspectives of key agents in the framework of Tate Modern; on the other hand, I propose to take the reader through a selection of positions that declare the emergence of curating as a scholarly field of discussions, in which I wish to situate my own project but from which I need to distinguish myself.

Section I.1.1 — Tate Modern: An exemplary framework

My knowledge about curating as well as my approach to the figure of the curator in the context of this PhD thesis has been produced through experience. With the aim of determining the figure of the curator as a contested site to be investigated throughout my doctoral project, I have chosen to focus my observations, interviews, and analysis on the British museum of international modern and contemporary art, Tate Modern. As an institution, Tate Modern's international scale and ambition for development within the context of contemporary art has no equal in Europe. Tate Modern provides here relevant examples of a variety of curatorial positions to work from and against. Four different curators, who currently shape the institution's programmes, have differently informed my work here: Nicholas Serota, Director of Tate since 1988 and currently the director of the four-headed institution composed of Tate Britain, Tate Modern, Tate Liverpool and Tate St Ives; Chris Dercon, Director, Tate Modern; Frances Morris, Director of Collection, International Art; and Catherine Wood, Senior Curator, International Art (Performance).²¹

Working at Tate Modern as an assistant curator has provided me with a specific context of practice and a unique insight into multiple cultures and practices of curating. In order to reach the possibility of reconfiguring the figure of the curator in my own terms, I will begin with articulating how my work experience at Tate Modern revealed this national museum as a site of shifts, complexities, and contestations pointing out the urgency of addressing the practice of curating in the present context. I will then specifically focus on the practice of curating in the context of Tate Modern as a national museum, concentrating on the four prominent figures whose perspectives on curating and on the figure of the curator at Tate Modern emphasize the fundamental divergences that are inherent to the running of an institution, in which coexists such a multiplicity of goals and constituencies.

I started working at Tate Modern as an assistant producer for 'Live Projects' in 2006. At the time, the title of 'assistant producer' aimed at making a distinction with the role of 'assistant curator' within the Curatorial Department of Tate Modern.²² Through the reference to 'production' that was central in the job title, I claim that the management of Tate Modern

²¹ At the moment of the publication of this thesis, Chris Dercon remains the director of Tate Modern but announced his departure in the horizon of 2017.

²² 'The Curatorial Department at Tate Modern is responsible for the programme of exhibitions and collection displays of international modern and contemporary art from around 1900 to the present day, and for researching and building, through purchase or gift, Tate's collection of international art.' (Source: Tate website) Two directors, Achim Borchardt-Hume, Director of Exhibitions, and Frances Morris, Director of Collection, International Art, lead the department. Staff profiles stress the distinctions between assistant curators, curators and senior curators, and emphasize their fields of expertise and dedicated fields of intervention in the museum.

affirmed a substantial difference between the work of assistant curators in the context of exhibitions and my work as an ‘assistant producer’ in the context of live-projects within the programme of performances curated by Catherine Wood. It took less than a year for my title as ‘assistant producer’ to change to the title of ‘assistant curator’²³ when Wood challenged that distinction. This distinction was far from anecdotal in the sense that it demonstrated the attempt of an institution such as the national museum to maintain boundaries between different constituencies within its walls. Although the museum does not completely deny that an exhibition involves dimensions of production, especially in the case of monographic exhibitions of living artists, it nevertheless shows its desire to produce a hierarchy within the roles and competencies held by curators, whereby interpretation (producing interpretative texts, giving lectures, etc.), conceptualization of an approach to the work of a given artist, theme, time period upon which the exhibition will rely, and an expertise that gives a curator the legitimacy to contribute to the constitution of a collection (based on historical and geographical parameters) are brought forward, while more practical and organizational competencies (managing a team of technicians and registrars, producing a schedule for the project, liaising with other departments on subjects as different as marketing, communication, fundraising, education etc.) are considered as secondary. In the situation I described, ‘live projects’ or ‘performances’ were initially perceived at Tate Modern as ephemeral and spectacular events, which required organizational skills and mainly involved technical competence more than they demanded interpretative skills. Performance was conventionally associated with ‘spectacle’ in its pejorative dimension. In its assimilation with spectacle, ‘performance’ gave the appearance of the museum endorsing a regime of activities, yet nevertheless only ensured its separation from its core, traditional mission. Tate Modern’s institutional approach to performance was particularly unclear at the beginning. Tate Modern and Tate Britain indeed introduced a variety of works coming from different disciplines. In the early phase of Tate’s Live programming, works stamped as ‘live art’, and sampled from what had been identified as a separate disciplinary strand in Great Britain²⁴ were programmed

²³ Following the departure of one of the assistant curators on maternity leave, I was asked to fill in on the role in the team working on the group exhibition *The World as a Stage* (curated by Catherine Wood and Jessica Morgan, Tate Modern, 24 October 2007 – 1 January 2008) which included the staging of different performances as part of the exhibition. Catherine Wood seized the opportunity of this new assignment to challenge my former job title.

²⁴ ‘Established in 1999, the Live Art Development Agency has both responded to, and impacted upon, the increasingly influential nature of Live Art practices in the UK and internationally by developing an extensive portfolio of specialized resources, opportunities, projects and publishing activities; and by working strategically, in partnership, and in consultation with practitioners and organisations in the cultural sector’ (Source: <http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/about>). In 2003, the Live Art Development Agency collaborated with Tate

alongside large-scale live events based on headline acts by Nick Cave, Arvo Pärt, Peter Sellars and PJ Harvey in the field of music, DV8, Merce Cunningham and Michael Clark in the fields of physical theatre and dance. These highly popular events contributed to asserting Tate Modern Turbine Hall's appeal as London's unequalled spectacular setting. In addition to these strands of programming, Tate began to provide support to artistic propositions emerging from a younger generation of artists such as Mark Leckey, Carlos Amorales, Jonathan Meese or Daria Martin.²⁵ Yet, as Tate gradually introduced performance, it lacked a normalizing institutional framework, which gave Catherine Wood, who took on the leadership of the live programme in 2003, a degree of freedom to explore the programme of performances as a test site for different propositions that ceaselessly questioned the way to produce meaningful relationships between temporary exhibitions, the collection, and artistic practices that demanded the various formats, sites and temporalities of the live event. The situation continued to change over the years I worked at Tate Modern. The issues of the role and place given to artistic practices in the expanded field of performance within the context of a national museum such as Tate Modern exemplified the repeated situation that this museum found itself in: confronted by tensions at work both within and outside its walls, it was forced to adjust itself to contemporary shifts, and more particularly of interest here, to the increasing number of contemporary artists invested in the expanded field of performance and referring to a rich history of artistic experiments along this same vein, some of which the Tate Gallery had hosted in the 1970s and 1980s.

The positioning of Tate Modern appeared to me as all encompassing, and worked extremely hard to perform a great number — sometimes contradictory — tasks. Although I cannot claim any expertise on the matter, it is commonly known that the Tate Collection suffers from important gaps among its modern holdings, in comparison with other European national museums. Maybe partly for that reason, the issue of the representation of the international

Modern on the 3-day exhibition titled *Live Culture* (27 – 30 March 2003), including artists and artists' collectives such as Franko B, Forced Entertainment, La Ribot or Guillermo Gomez-Pena.

Information: <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/live-culture>).

²⁵ Between 2003 and 2006, Catherine Wood worked on the development of the Live programme across both London institutions. In the context of the Live events sponsored by former online banking services Egg, she invited a series of younger artists to present their work: London-based artists Mark Leckey and David Thorpe, Japanese artists' collective Kyupi Kyupi, Mexican artist Carlos Amorales, German artists' collective hobypopMUSEUM and New York-based artist Gogol Bordello. In 2004 and 2005, she continued to invite contemporary artists to present live works such as Daria Martin and Jonathan Meese, or Ian White and Jimmy Robert at Tate Britain, while sustaining collaborations with other institutions such as the London contemporary dance festival Dance Umbrella, inviting for example choreographer Rosemary Butcher to present a series of works in the Turbine Hall. In 2006, Beatrix Ruf, curator of the Tate Triennial, invited Wood to curate a programme of live works, which included artists Lali Chetwynd (today known as Marvin Gay Chetwynd), Pablo Bronstein, Céline Condorelli, Liam Gillick, Marc Camille Chaimowicz, Gerard Byrne and Linder.

collection of contemporary art has been crucial to the institution. I was continuously amazed during my time at Tate Modern by the affirmation of the necessity to represent art from all geographies, and the subsequent methodology invented to carry out this ambition. Curators from around the globe hired as advisers on the collection, curators having an expertise in specific geographical areas hired to work specifically on these questions within the curatorial team, putting their specialised knowledge to the service of both exhibitions and collection, along with groups of collectors gathered to support the acquisitions of works from specific regions of the world, and invited collaborations with young curators working in art centres internationally.²⁶ I would like to draw attention to how this obsession with ‘going global’ emphasizes a tendency to homogenize the institution’s relationship to the world, preferring to tick all boxes rather than engage more substantially with any specific geography.

I have witnessed the praising of the spirit of experimentation in the projects led by curators such as Catherine Wood in the context of performance or Stuart Comer in the context of film, and yet no proposition led by these curators to take their experimentations to a different level — the level of large temporary exhibitions — managed to get off the ground. The investment of the institution into the refurbishing of the former oil tanks, which have become known as The Tanks, makes manifest the compromise that has been found: to provide a separated space for practices in the expanded fields of film and performance. Separation does not only mean that the institution understands the necessity of differentiating the needs for certain practices,²⁷ it also affirms its desire to produce hierarchies, to distribute spaces and functions and roles in a certain way.²⁸ Between 2006 and 2009, Catherine and I did not have the human or financial resources to travel around the world to meet artists working with performance. We were however often asked to open up the programme to other, further geographies. Nevertheless, we did our best to exhaust the geography of the institution itself, exploring its

²⁶ I refer to the programme of exhibitions carried out in the context of Tate Modern’s ‘Project Space’ (formerly the Level 2 gallery).

For more information: <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibitionseries/project-space>

²⁷ I refer to the necessity to have green rooms, specific rigging for lights or sound, and flexible seating structure, for example. It has cost a lot of money and labour in the past to temporarily set up such things in the Turbine Hall for instance, or to try to adapt the auditorium to put it to use for performance.

²⁸ The status of the Turbine Hall is exemplary in that regard: the impressive architectural qualities of the space (length: 155m, width: 23m and height: 35m) attribute it the status of a street-like space. Envisioned as a space where people would meet and gather, while retaining the possibility to display art, the Turbine Hall has provided the museum with the opportunity to commission installations of monumental scale and attract big corporate sponsors such as Unilever (Turbine Hall commissions 2000 – 2012), Egg (Live programme 2003), UBS (Collection rehang and Live programme 2006 – 2009) and BMW (Live programme since 2013). The framework of the Live programme has allowed to emphasize the spectacular setting of the Turbine Hall, using its scale to stage works from the fields of dance, music and theatre.

multifaceted site, addressing the distribution of spaces and of audiences within it, allowing artists to refresh our views and explore it anew again.

Since 1917, Tate has been responsible for national collections of British art from 1500 to the present day as well as international modern and contemporary art. Tate has been totally independent from the National Gallery since 1955, and substantially expanded in space by opening new galleries in 1979. In 1992, it was agreed to expand Tate in London by creating a separate space dedicated to international modern and contemporary art: the plans for Tate Modern were unveiled in 1996 and it opened in 2000 in the iconic former power station on Bankside, converted by architects Herzog & de Meuron. A few years later, Tate Modern's collection displays were rethought which led to a substantial rehang in 2006. In 2009, a new development of Tate Modern was announced heading towards a conversion of the oil tanks, which opened as 'The Tanks'²⁹ in 2012, and in anticipation of the opening of a newly built extension of Tate Modern in 2016. The division of the former Tate Gallery into Tate Britain and Tate Modern affirmed a fundamental yet problematic separation between the British and International Collections, an issue that was preceded in the late 1980s by two extensions of Tate, first in the North, in Liverpool, with Tate Liverpool opening in 1988; and secondly in the West, in Cornwall, where Tate St Ives opened in 1991. The actual branding of Tate, branching out through a 'family' of four galleries known as Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool, Tate St Ives, and Tate Modern has been in existence since the opening of Tate Modern in 2000. This constant development of Tate³⁰ — accelerated in the 1990s — confirms the singularity of its model in comparison with other European institutions, which have nevertheless been looking at Tate as a model in more recent years as the development of major French institutions such as Le Louvre in Lens³¹ and the Centre Pompidou in Metz³² show.³³ Tate's

²⁹ The Tanks, which I mentioned previously, have originally contained Bankside Power Station's ancillary plant and equipment. Tate describes them as 'ambitious and imaginative installations are pushing traditional gallery spaces to their limits. ... The three awe-inspiring oil tanks at the foundation of the new building will provide a unique raw industrial space to display large-scale artists' installations, as well as performances and film.' Source: <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/projects/tate-modern-project/performance-and-installation-spaces>

³⁰ This spatial development of Tate has been reinforced by other strategies of collaboration with national institutions of different scales, through the initiatives led by Tate National such as The Plus Tate Network or Artists Room.

³¹ In 2012, the museum Louvre Lens has opened in the town of Lens, about 200 km from Paris. Louvre Lens has for objective a form of decentralisation of the national collection administered by Le Louvre in Paris. In the context of a broader action of local programme of regeneration, Lens, a former industrial town that has suffered substantial destructions during the Second World War, was chosen as the city where le Louvre would attempt to bring national collections to a public that has little access to them.

³² Centre Pompidou Metz was inaugurated in 2010. It came out of the meeting of two dynamics: on the one hand, the desire on the part of the Centre Pompidou in Paris – for reasons similar to the development of le Louvre – to improve the circulation of the collection of the Musée national d'art moderne in France; on the other hand, the

constant growing scale and scope demonstrate its ambition in terms of cultural leadership on a national and international level, overcoming the limits of national frontiers thanks to a digital strategy that plays an integral role in Tate's vision of culture and entrepreneurship.³⁴ The complex infrastructure and network that Tate has strengthened over time constitutes a set of cultural norms and a successful business model. The institution foregrounds the innovation, creativity, and entrepreneurship of many individuals in the service of a unique ambition condensed in Tate as a brand.

In the current context, Sir Nicholas Serota, director of Tate since 1988, claims the coexistence of distinct models of curatorial practice: on the one hand, curators who see themselves as art historians; on the other hand, curators who rather consider themselves as agents of artists. However, Serota, who is a historian by formation but a curator by practice, insists these contradictions can be resolved. He points out the need to cherish these differences within an institution like Tate Modern whose challenge is to avoid introducing one way of doing things, but, on the contrary,

to show that the museum can create a multiplicity of arenas where discourse can take place. ... We have to reflect these different kinds of needs and practices. It's about differentiating these spaces. We need the right instruments. The challenge is to find a way of integrating all this.³⁵

Yet, he acknowledges that the coexistence of these different models within the same institution can produce tensions. Frances Morris, Director of Collection, International Art, who has been working at Tate since 1987, similarly evoked the tensions inherent to the increasing individualization of curatorial practice, a process that has become visible within institutions such as Tate Modern. She deplores the importance given to personal careers above the dedication to the institution and the identification with the institution's projects.

local ambition, which elected Metz as the ideal site for the institution to be built, to make the region more culturally attractive and radiate on a European scale, appealing to neighbouring citizens from Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany.

³³ It however distinguishes itself from the neoliberal concept of franchise initiated by the Guggenheim through its international development in Italy (Venice), Spain (Bilbao) and the Emirates (Abu Dhabi). This global strategy has been driven by financial partnerships and geared toward the sole interest of the consolidation of the Guggenheim brand.

³⁴ Tate Digital Strategy has been central to the ambition of the institution, demonstrating its advanced position in relation to its European competitors through its significant contribution as a digital publisher. The digital content encompasses the digitisation of the collection, research publications, exhibitions experiences, short videos, blog posts, live broadcasting, presence in various social media, etc. More information: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/tate-digital-strategy-2013-15-digital-dimension-everything>).

³⁵ Interview with Sir Nicholas Serota, Tate Britain, March 2014.

She finds that for many curators working at Tate Modern, the institution is being used as a springboard to promote individual competence and ambition.

The current director of Tate Modern, Chris Dercon, embodies a different vision of curatorial practice within Tate in the sense that, for him, the distinction between two main paradigms of curatorial practice is no longer relevant. For him, the problem of the curator in the present context is how to deal with the existence of a proliferation of objects; visitors of the museum, based on the model of the consumer, are eager to be advised on how to select and choose among this proliferation. Dercon embraces the individualization of curatorial practice and affirms that the key role of the curator is to select, to function as chooser, under the scrutiny of a mass audience that wonders why they decide to expose publicly such or such an object, and what gives this particular person the legitimacy to make that choice. For Dercon, the museum curator must play with these questions of selection; of forgetting and bringing back into the present light. The role of the curator lies in this playful confrontation between a series of objects and the spectators that constitute an audience. One of the key issues for museums in the twenty-first century is, according to him, to deal with the increasing mass of spectators attending exhibitions. Then the challenge is to choreograph the audience and invent new rules. For Dercon, the function of the curator has been transformed alongside the transformation of the museum and its function.

People no longer come for spiritual and emotional experiences. They come for encounters and discourses as a form of social knowledge. The museum has become an instrument for forgetting. Forgetting is very important to remember and make decisions.³⁶

In Dercon's view, the form of the exhibition is a fundamental instrument to carry out the new function of the museum: 'the exhibition is an experimental theatre' within which the spectators engage in physical and mental exercises. He considers that the exhibition is more than a pedagogical and political instrument; it can have social and psychological effects. In that sense, Dercon asserts that the challenges curators should tackle have to do with furthering the exploration of exhibition making forms alongside more traditional formats such as the monographic exhibition, where the narrative role parallels that of novels in literature. Dercon claims that the exhibition constitutes 'the meeting point between people who know something and people who know something else'.³⁷ His perspective on curatorial practice and on the function of the museum today is critical of the idea of autonomy and of the idea of artistic

²² Interview with Chris Dercon, Tate Modern, March 2014.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

separation. On the contrary, he anchors the role of the curator in a much broader context, which places the curator as selector in an ambiguous position in regards to an expanded cultural and commercial context. However, his denial of the autonomy and of the separation of the artistic field from other disciplines and social, political, and cultural phenomena broadens the scope of curatorial practice. The emphasis that Dercon places on the role of choice, the distribution of knowledge, and the issue of choreography in relation to exhibition making have played an important role in this project, and will be addressed further in this thesis.

Nicholas Serota and Chris Dercon therefore provide distinct and contradictory perspectives and demands on the role of the curator in the context of Tate Modern. I would suggest that these contradictory demands could be accounted for through the multiple activities going on within the museum: beginning with collecting and exhibiting; the display of collections and the organising of temporary exhibitions; the increasing number of events of different kinds including events considered as artistic while others have more of a pedagogic objective. Despite their divergences, they provide different variations of the same curatorial paradigm: they consider the figure of the curator as an agent in the service of the institution. In their views on the curator, the subject position of the curator as such does not vary; it is rather the shifting role of the museum as an institution that is perceived differently.

Section I.1.2 — Complexities and contestations: The figure of the curator and the scope of curatorial practice

In the following sections, I will apply a historical perspective to the discourses that have taken the figure of the curator and the practice of curating as objects of study, intending to highlight the various shifts among the terms used to articulate critical positions in the context of curating, and bring forward fundamental questions raised in relation to the figure of the curator and the scope of his or her practice. I have read a large number of written contributions produced by a relatively small number of curators, art historians, philosophers and sociologists in order to be aware of the spectrum of issues in discussion about curating as well as the historical and theoretical frameworks that have been shaping the knowledge produced about and by curatorial practice. I will thus attempt to bring forward relevant aspects that contribute to shaping a plurality of perspectives that are currently available regarding the figure of the curator. My aim has been to reveal that there is no such thing as a definition for the role of the curator but rather a multiplicity of discourses that attempt to delineate trajectories of transformation of a figure; acknowledged as having increasing significance in the contemporary period. This increasing significance of the figure of the curator however has proved to mean different things. What is of particular interest to me is the disagreements that have emerged within the different constituencies engaged in curatorial practice around the claim of the term ‘author’ or ‘exhibition auteur’ to define the work of the curator, and also the ongoing discussions aiming to distinguish between the terms ‘curating’ and ‘the curatorial’.

I will start here with a discussion led by sociologists Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak regarding the exhibition ‘Vienne, Naissance d’un siècle’,³⁸ which took place at Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou in 1986, curated by Gérard Régnier, better known through his literary alias, Jean Clair. This exhibition intended to depict Vienna as the centre of seminal developments in the fields of music, literature, architecture, the visual arts, and sciences, particularly through the birth of psychoanalysis. In an article titled ‘From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur. Inventing a singular position’, published in 1989, Heinich and Pollak claim that the profession of the museum curator appears in a state of

³⁸ ‘Vienne, Naissance d’un siècle’ was considered as a phenomenon in the context of the history of transdisciplinary exhibitions carried out at the Centre Pompidou as it welcomed 600 000 visitors over 70 days of exhibition (6000 visitors a day). 52000 copies of the catalogue of the exhibition were sold. The global budget of the exhibition reached 8,5 millions of francs (about 1,2 millions euros), which was comparable to a film budget in the cinema industry.

crisis.³⁹ The choice of this particular exhibition has to do with the unique insight provided by the scholarly informed article written by Heinich and Régnier. They suggest that an important shift in the role of the curator became visible in the 1980s. Their methodology consists in describing the role of the museum curator as a standard reference against which they verify the transformations that have occurred with the emergence of a differently positioned curatorial practice. In the context of this thesis, I will, in turn, consider their description of the traditional museum curator as a reference. In addition, their observations about an emerging position of the ‘auteur of exhibitions’ will also constitute a standard reference to define the role of the exhibition curator in the context of the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. Taking Gérard Régnier/Jean Clair and the Musée national d’art moderne as an example it is essential to emphasize that the connection between the role of the curator and the status of the author takes place within the context of a national museum, rather than outside of the institutional framework.

According to Heinich and Pollak, the role of the traditional museum curator has been characterised by a ‘paradoxical injunction’: the curator is expected to ‘enrich the heritage with contemporary works’ relying simultaneously on his or her own taste — considered as ‘an extremely personal quality’ — as well as on collective values.⁴⁰ On the basis of this paradox, Heinich and Pollak acknowledge the instability inherent to the task and emphasize the risk of error that ‘the curator’s craft’ involves. They also observe that

the position places its occupant in a relationship with artists — an extremely individual lot — at least in terms of the works which the curator is charged with acquiring, protecting, circulating, and generally speaking, exposing to public scrutiny either materially (hanging, framing, lighting) or symbolically (attributive research, documentation, analysis, cataloguing).⁴¹

³⁹ This article, initially published in French in *Sociologie du travail*, vol. 31, n° 1, 1989 (29-49), comes out of a broader study taking the exhibition “Vienne, Naissance d’un siècle” as an object of sociological research. Heinich and Pollack published the whole study titled “Vienne à Paris. Portrait d’une exposition”, which was commissioned by the Bibliothèque Publique d’Information, Centre Pompidou, in the context of their collection of research publications. The two sociologists developed their study of the exhibition by taking three distinct perspectives: of the exhibition, examining both its conception and its realization, of forms of mediation, analysing the guided tours as well as the press coverage, and finally the perspective of the audience, organizing their study of the audience by distinguishing attendance — as a quantitative approach —, perception and investment — as forms of qualitative approach.

⁴⁰ Nathalie Heinich and Michel Pollack, ‘From museum curator to exhibitions *auteur*: inventing a singular position’, in *Thinking about Exhibitions*, ed. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W Ferguson, Sandy Nair (New York: Routledge, 1996), 233.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 234.

For them, the work assigned to the curator requires qualities of ‘abnegation’ and ‘devotion’ as well as an ‘erasure of the person’.⁴² Yet, Heinich and Pollak notice that a shift becomes prominent in the mid 1980s through which emerges an authorial position. A profession, which was initially characterized as a public function, begins to define itself as an author’s production. The authorial quality granted to this production manifests itself in the prominence of the name of the curator, the idiosyncratic character of the curator’s choice and display of works, and, in this particular instance, the unusual significance of literature and psychoanalysis as fundamental filters through which Régnier/Clair interpreted the works of art selected. Heinich and Pollack stress that this change is strongly connected to the increasing phenomenon of temporary exhibitions, which belittles the importance of the display of collections. They also assess a ‘deprofessionalization’ of the function of the curator and enlist three different aspects that define this phenomenon: ‘deregulation in access to the job’ that becomes open to different kind of professionals, ‘deinstitutionalization of the criteria of competence’ and a process of individualization of the role of the curator as well as the growing importance of the curatorial ‘signature’.⁴³ Heinich and Pollack’s analysis does not propose to consider a strict shift from one condition to another; they rather envisage the possibility for a curator who fulfils a given function within a museum context to access a position of *auteur* within that same context. Therefore, I would here insist on the absence of a radical transformation from one condition of practice to another, but rather gradual shifts, and the coexistence of different paradigms within the context of the museum as institution. Heinich and Pollack make their claims based on observations, interviews, and subsequent analysis that they carried out in the specific context of the exhibition ‘Vienne, naissance d’un siècle’.

Régnier was the curator of the Marcel Duchamp exhibition, which opened for the inauguration of the Centre Pompidou in 1977, under the artistic direction of Pontus Hultén. ‘Vienne, naissance d’un siècle’ belonged to a genealogy of exhibitions, which became the trademark of the Centre Pompidou between 1977 and 1981: exhibitions curated by Hultén such as ‘Paris–New York’, ‘Paris–Moscow: 1900–1930’, ‘Paris–Berlin, 1900–1933’, ‘Paris 1937–Paris 1957’. These exhibitions embraced the interdisciplinary ambition of the new museum-cum-centre for contemporary artistic creation, combining visual arts with design, architecture, dance, theatre, and music. Régnier — who had a particular interest in literature and philosophy — launched with ‘Vienne, naissance d’un siècle’ a series of exhibitions that

⁴² *Ibid.*, 234.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 237–238.

attempted to encompass the history of ideas as well as the history of arts; for example, giving a crucial role to psychoanalysis in shaping the conceptual approach to the exhibition on Vienna. In their article, Heinich and Pollack emphasize the singularity of Régnier's curatorial methodology, and draw attention to his personality traits and the various role and activities he undertook including his literary career under a different alias, his polemic articles as an art critic, and his managerial authority as the curator of a large exhibition summoning various fields of expertise. Heinich and Pollack claim that Régnier/Clair privileged the opacity of the exhibition as a work in its own right over the traditional transparency assigned to the medium of the exhibition. Régnier/Clair began working in this manner with the exhibition taking Vienna as its central subject to develop a mode of exhibition-making that specifically brought forward the spiritual and intellectual dimensions of exhibitions, attempting to capture something broader than the history of art, reaching out to the all-encompassing spirit of an epoch.

Heinich and Pollack's contribution offers an important insight that situates the discussion about the changing conditions of curatorial practice in time. They propose to consider the process of singularization of the curator's role through a notion of the author that they borrow from the field of cinema; their 'exhibition *auteur*' is indeed a variation on the French expression of *cinéma d'auteur*,⁴⁴ which emerged in the 1950s in France and has been used to refer to the cinematic production of filmmakers — such as Jean-Luc Godard or François Truffaut in France — who put forward their artistic personality and their control over the process of montage. In choosing this parallel with cinema, Heinich and Pollack emphasize that contemporary art exhibitions share with cinema 'an economy of temporary cultural products for mass distribution'. Although the approximation of the curator with the figure of the author can be traced back to Harald Szeemann in the 1970s,⁴⁵ Heinich and Pollack demonstrate that the issue of authorship within curatorial practice has overcome the

⁴⁴ The designation of "cinéma d'auteur" refers to the debates that have emerged in the context of cinema in regards to the status of film directors and the concept of a *politique des auteurs*, brought forward and discussed by film directors such as François Truffaut, André Bazin, or Eric Rohmer in the 1950s, especially through a series of articles published in *les Cahiers du Cinéma*. The term of author was invested by different directors, but was fuelled with contradictions from the outset. Despite their avowed disagreements, the status of author brought forward the idea that a film consisted in the organization of a fictional space and the director, who worked with a large team of collaborators whose artistic contributions were fundamental, had the responsibility to achieve a coherence and insured the construction of a point of view. Nevertheless the critical status of the author did not support an aesthetic cult of personality or the obsolete notion of artistic genius. The *politique des auteurs* aimed at proposing an approach of cinema that did not comply with the commercial concept of genre supported by the film industry in favour of a heterogeneous approach of artistic signature and style, resilient to commercial forms of classification and normalization.

⁴⁵ Nathalie Heinich carried out an interview with Harald Szeemann, published in *Harald Szeemann un cas singulier. Entretien* (Paris: L'Échoppe, 1995).

opposition between museum curator and independent curator to become enfolded positions by the time of Régnier/Clair.

In 1996, Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairn edited an anthology titled *Thinking about Exhibitions*, which has been a crucial point of reference for writing on exhibitions and on curatorial practice since the late 1990s. Although this anthology points out that there was an existence of research and writing on the subject of art exhibitions since the 1970s and 1980s,⁴⁶ it also emphasizes the increased production of texts on exhibitions in the beginning of the 1990s; some of which go back to explore exhibition histories from the previous decades. As they affirm in their collective introduction, '*Thinking about Exhibitions* adopts the form of an anthology to highlight the emergence and consolidation of a new discourse on art exhibitions as well as to bring into debate a range of issues at play in their formation and reception'.⁴⁷ The editors organize the different contributions to the anthology on a list of terms: 'exhibitions history and histories, curatorship, exhibition sites and forms of installation, narratology and spectatorship'.⁴⁸ These categories highlight a multiplicity of perspectives from which histories of curatorial practice can be built. I will thus draw attention to some of the contributions assembled in this anthology, as they have greatly informed my project.

French art historian Jean-Marc Poinot attempts to propose a typology of large exhibitions on the basis of their inherent discursive frameworks, considering exhibitions as the ideological constructions of curators rather than the site of exposure for the aesthetic projects of their participants. He makes a distinction between exhibitions that write, or rewrite, history (Pontus Hultén's exhibitions at Centre Pompidou, Edy de Wilde's '60/80: attitudes, concepts, images' at Stedelijk in Amsterdam, 1982, Kaspar Koenig's 'Westkunst' in Cologne, 1981); exhibitions that enunciate an aesthetic project however different these aesthetic values might be (Seth Siegelaub's exhibitions of conceptual art in the 1970s, Harald Szeemann with 'When Attitudes Become Forms', Rudi Fuchs with Documenta 7) — privileging aesthetic and formal relationships over chronology;⁴⁹ and, at last, exhibitions founded on symbolic values (with the example of Harald Szeemann's 'Museum of Obsessions'). The approaches of American curator Bruce W. Ferguson, Dutch art historian Mieke Bal and French philosopher Jean-

⁴⁶ The anthology indeed republishes texts written the preceding decades such as texts by Brian O'Doherty, Lawrence Alloway, Daniel Buren or Jean-François Lyotard.

⁴⁷ Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nair, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, 2.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁹ This disregard for chronology is discussed in the contribution of Debora J. Meijers 'The Museum and the 'ahistorical' exhibition' (*Thinking about Exhibitions*, 7 – 20).

François Lyotard⁵⁰ share their various attempts at considering the exhibition and the museum as sites of signification from the perspective of semiotics, considering the museum and the exhibition through metaphorical relationships to language, narrative, and discourse. Andrea Fraser, who wrote on artist Louise Lawler's artistic practice, Martha Ward, and Germano Celant contribute different approaches regarding modes of display, engaging with the act of exhibiting as an act of staging, and of presenting and making visible. Other perspectives, such as Brian O'Doherty's text titled 'The gallery as a gesture' or Rosalind Krauss's 'Postmodern museum without walls', deal with spatiality in a different manner, engaging with the material and architectural qualities of the spaces that host temporary exhibitions. Finally, the multiple and shifting roles of curators are questioned through different contributions, among these, Lawrence Alloway's republished 1975 *Artforum* article questions the entrepreneurial pressures that are exerted on curators, deprived of their traditional educational functions in favour of renewed responsibilities in production; Nathalie Heinich and Michel Pollack, previously mentioned, discuss a shift in curatorial practice towards authorial production; Clementine Deliss discusses her experience of working as a curator in Africa and her encounters with works of art beyond familiar geographies. *Thinking about Exhibitions* therefore emphasizes the very large spectrum of issues, questions, and positions inherent to the task of writing a history of exhibitions and of curating as practice, and demonstrates a first effort at providing a methodology for dealing with this new field. The decade during which *Thinking about Exhibitions* emerged is also the decade during which formations to curating have started to appear within the framework of visual art centres such as Le Magasin in Grenoble or de Appel arts centre in Amsterdam, as well as in traditional pedagogical contexts such as universities. In regard to this emergence, artist Sarah Pierce writes: 'The MA in curating signalled a turning tide, not just in the field of curating, but in the ways that both curators and artists were beginning to understand the relationship between research, art-making and exhibition-making and how they fell outside or in between Art History's specialist knowledge and the media specific specialization of Fine Art'.⁵¹ In the process of this professionalization of the function fulfilled by the curator, which expands beyond the confines of the disciplinary fields of art history and fine art, the definition of both the curator and the field of curatorial practice became unstable, which the proliferation of publications in the next decade reflects in exposing the diversity of critical positions.

⁵⁰ Jean-François Lyotard curated the seminal exhibition 'Les Immatériaux' at the Centre Pompidou in 1985.

⁵¹ Sarah Pierce, 'The Simple Operator', in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury, 2013) Chapter 11, foreword, page 2, Kindle edition for mac.

In 2009, Hans Ulrich Obrist published *A Brief History of Curating*,⁵² which consists in a series of interviews with ‘pioneering curators Anne d’Harnoncourt, Werner Hofmann, Jean Leering, Franz Meyer, Seth Siegelaub, Walter Zanini, Johannes Cladders, Lucy Lippard, Walter Hopps, Pontus Hulten, and Harald Szeemann’. More than a decade following the publication of *Thinking about Exhibitions*, the emphasis has shifted toward the personality of the curator rather than the material or discursive event of the exhibition. Although *A Brief History of Curating* was published thirteen years after *Thinking about Exhibitions*, Christophe Cherix, in his preface to Obrist’s publication, quotes the seminal anthology:

Exhibitions have become *the* medium through which most art becomes known. Not only have the number and range of exhibitions increased dramatically in recent years, but museums and art galleries such as Tate in London and the Whitney in New York now display their permanent collections as a series of temporary exhibitions.

Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained, and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions — especially exhibitions of contemporary art — establish and administer the cultural meanings of art.⁵³

While the justifying narrative remains the same, the approach fundamentally differs. Obrist no longer talks about a multiplicity of possible approaches to explore the way exhibitions are producing discourse (sociological, philosophical, historical — and more — discourses) as such; he produces a history of curating based on a limited number of essential actors, among which he positions himself.

In contrast with Obrist’s approach privileging first-person narratives, other initiatives emerge shifting the emphasis on the construction of a history of exhibitions. In 2008, Tate Modern organised, in collaboration with the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, a conference titled ‘Landmark exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows since 1968’, through which the ambition was to ‘to review a field of historical research that had gone heretofore largely unnoticed: the phenomenological, sociological, affective, economic and political contexts that condition art’s

⁵² Hans Ulrich Obrist, *A Brief History of Curating* (Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2009).

⁵³ Greenberg, Ferguson, and Nair, *Thinking about Exhibitions*, 2; Christophe Cherix, ‘Preface’ in *A Brief History of Curating*, 7.

presentation'.⁵⁴ The challenge for Tate Modern was to provide a range of narratives and discourses that would defy habitual perspectives centred on Western histories, and to move beyond the traditional focus on large exhibitions and major institutions in order to look into lesser-known experiments.⁵⁵ And in 2009, the research and publishing organisation Afterall launched a research project entitled 'Exhibition Histories' that consisted of a series of publications and events. In collaboration with Central Saint Martins, Afterall developed the Mres Art: Exhibition Studies course, opening up a space of research dedicated to the history of exhibitions and providing a pedagogical alternative to specialised formations in curating, and thus making available an approach to curatorial practice less centred on the person and personality of the curator. Through the pursuit of these different research endeavours, Afterall and Tate Modern thus demonstrated the will to engage with the complexities, multiple constituencies, geographies, and histories of exhibition-making and curatorial practices. Although the figure of the curator appears as an important actor with which these research projects engage from different perspectives, curatorial practice is considered here as a complex set of subjects and objects that cannot be limited to one-person narratives.

In a 2007 article, Paul O'Neill proposes to consider the advent of 'a curatorial turn', which on the one hand reflects 'the ascendancy of the curatorial gesture in the 1990s' as it 'began to establish curating as a potential nexus for discussion, critique and debate', and, on the other hand, further intensifies the critical debate surrounding curating,⁵⁶ that according to O'Neill, was the more fundamental shift for the role of the curator can be traced back to the 1960s, recalling what Seth Siegelaub described as a 'demystification' of the role of the agents and institutions involved in presenting art to the public. This coming to grips with the ideological role of the exhibition as a *dispositif*, and of the curator as one of its key actors, began to produce, in addition to long existing critical discussion on artistic practice, critical discourse

⁵⁴ Marko Daniel and Antony Hudek, introduction to the 'Landmark Exhibitions conference', *Tate Papers* Issue 12 (autumn 2009). Last accessed 21 October 2015. URL: <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/landmark-exhibitions-issue-introduction>.

⁵⁵ 'Art beyond Europe and the USA, the non-Western, the non-White, and the non-hetero-normative. No less than a decentred geography, this 'new' field of enquiry challenges us to reconsider the temporal conventions of telling history: Where to start? Where to place the symbolic 'year zero' before and after which this history begins? Can a history be told without punctuation by landmark events – crises, catastrophes, successions – that allow it to appear, precisely, as a history and not as a motley assortment of disconnected points in time?' (Marko Daniel and Antony Hudek, *Tate Papers* Issue 12).

⁵⁶ Paul O'Neill, 'The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse' (2007), in *Issues in curating contemporary art and performance*, ed. Judith Rugg, Michèle Sedgwick (Chicago: the University of Chicago Press, 2008), 13. O'Neill refers to an article written by Alex Farquharson ('I curate, you curate, we curate', *Art Monthly*, issue 269, 2003) in which he emphasizes the appearance of the verb 'to curate' and the adjective 'curatorial', identifying through this linguistic production the need to produce new terms to discuss emerging issues related to the field of curating.

taking the exhibition as its primary object of study. In his condensed history of contemporary curating, O'Neill demonstrates that the 'curatorial turn' is specifically characterized by its imbrication within the dynamics of globalization. Although large-scale exhibitions began to appear in the late 1980s, with the prime example of 'Les Magiciens de la Terre'⁵⁷ in 1989, what O'Neill designates as a 'culture of curation' is more characterized by the proliferation of Biennials and Triennials across the globe in the 1990s; no longer simply international events but quasi institutions of transnational nature, the curators of these exhibitions set themselves the task of tackling local as much as global issues. In this context, O'Neill affirms that

the populist perception of the activity of curating has changed in large part due to the spread of this Biennial culture, whereby new degrees of visibility and responsibility were placed upon the curator.⁵⁸

O'Neill also engages the discussion on another level that forces a redefinition of curatorial practice. He argues that the role of the curator has become akin to the role of the artist in its claiming of creativity, of authorship, and of the free exercise of subjectivity. O'Neill retraces the terms of this complex discussion across the period between the 1970s to the present, referring to Documenta 5 of Harald Szeemann (strongly criticized by the artist Daniel Buren), Jan Hoet's Documenta 9⁵⁹, or more recent projects such as Hans Ulrich Obrist's 'Do It' (1993) or Jens Hoffmann's 'A Little Bit of History Repeated' (2001). O'Neill also argues that the new set of responsibilities granted to curating has led curators to support their exhibitions through more discursive and pedagogic events, such as talks, discussions, workshops, lectures, and publications.⁶⁰ The increasing importance given to the production of discursive events requires O'Neill to question the relationships between practice and discourse in the context of curating. O'Neill's attempt to assess the shifts at work within the context of curating demonstrates an intense negotiation of the very definition of discourse where curatorial practice is concerned. O'Neill's text contrasts different conceptions of the

⁵⁷ 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', Centre Georges Pompidou & Grande Halle de la Villette, 18 May - 14 August 1989, curated by Jean-Hubert Martin.

⁵⁸ O'Neill, 'The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse', 17.

⁵⁹ Jan Hoet's *Documenta 9* is discussed by O'Neill through the critical position offered by Dorothy Richter; D. Richter 'Curating Degree Zero', in *Curating Degree Zero, An International Symposium*, ed. Barnaby Drabble and Dorothy Richter (Nürnberg: Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999), 16.

⁶⁰ O'Neill largely refers to Elena Filipovic in this section and quotes: 'This striking expansion goes in tandem with curatorial discourses that increasingly distinguish the biennial or mega exhibition as larger than the mere presentation of artworks; they are understood as vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate.' (Elena Filipovic, 'The Global White Cube', in *The manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary art exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, ed. E. Filipovic and B. Vanderlinden (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

discursive;⁶¹ referring to critical literature and scholarly informed contributions on curating from the 1990s, he considers exhibitions as a ‘contemporary forms of rhetoric, complex expressions of persuasion, whose strategies aim to produce a prescribed set of values and social relations for audiences’.⁶² O’Neill’s understanding of discourse and discursivity is largely informed by Michel Foucault’s writing in the sense that O’Neill distinguishes a traditional conception of discourse considered as an ideological and signifying construction, from a modern conception of discursivity which defines the specific nature of a work that is concerned with the entanglement of different registers of discourse, systems of language, and multiple points of view, and positively embraces the proliferation of possible meanings and readings. According to O’Neill, discursivity has thus emerged in the context of curating through the multiplicity of events — such as talks, lectures, or conversations — organised in the context of exhibitions, which proposes a much larger field of discourse expanding beyond the limitations of interpretation and reaching out towards a broader intellectual debate. In this context, O’Neill reveals the ambivalences and tensions inherent to the attempt at distinguishing between curating as practice and curating as discourse. O’Neill refers to Benjamin Buchloh in order to point out the latter’s critical position regarding the field of curating within which curatorial productions proliferate and yet lack the articulation of critical positions made explicit through verbal discourse. However, O’Neill emphasizes other perspectives deployed by contemporary practitioners, such as Gavin Wade and Dave Beech, for whom the notion of curatorial discourse is neither a supplement nor a substitute for practice; on the contrary, they attempt to argue that both ‘doing and saying are forms of acting on the world’.⁶³ O’Neill also refers to the writing of Mick Wilson that exposes the ambivalence that surrounds the turn toward the discursive in artistic and curatorial contexts.⁶⁴ Wilson calls for a rethinking of the relations between so-called discursive, dialogical and conversational modes of practices that have emerged across the fields of artistic practice and

⁶¹ According to the Oxford dictionary, ‘discursive’ is first applied to the act of ‘digressing from subject to subject’, describing a style of speech or writing qualified as ‘fluent and expansive’. ‘Discursive’ is also understood as being related ‘to discourse or modes of discourse’, and most importantly, in traditional philosophical terms, it qualifies an ‘archaic proceeding by argument or reasoning rather than by intuition’.

⁶² O’Neill, ‘The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse’, 16. O’Neill quotes different contributions published in the anthology *Thinking about Exhibitions*.

⁶³ O’Neill refers to Gavin Wade and Dave Beech, *Curating in the 21st Century* (New Art Gallery Walsall, 1999), 9–10; O’Neill, ‘The curatorial turn: from practice to discourse’, 19.

⁶⁴ Mike Wilson, ‘Curatorial moments and discursive turns’, in *Curating Subjects*, ed. Paul O’Neill (London: Open Editions/Occasional Table, 2007). Despite of what the title may suggest, the anthology *Curating Subjects* does not engage with the concept of subject as such. The title proposes an alternative to the term ‘curator’, and considers curatorial practice from a greater diversity of perspectives, such as the perspective of artists engaged in exhibition making, or concerned with curatorial practice, such as Gavin Wade or Sarah Pierce. The lack of critical engagement with the term ‘subject’ as such, as if its meaning and significance could be taken for granted, however, encouraged me to pay particular attention to that concept in my own project.

curatorial practice. He insists on the role of the discursive in the context of a reputational economy, which characterized the global system of art institutions within which artists and curators evolve, and thus claims the need for a critical positioning regarding what we value as discursivity.

In his successive essays and edited anthologies on curating, O'Neill has stressed the necessity to expand the limited vocabulary available to discuss the transformations of the practice of curating and to produce a proper history of the practice of curating — not limited to first-person narratives — in order to have a ground on which to unfold changing approaches, methodologies, and critical discourses. O'Neill's take on curating through the idea of a curatorial turn, has been characterized by an ambivalent discursivity and a constant negotiation between notions of practice and discourse, which he himself struggles to clarify. O'Neill's efforts have been supported by other curators and academics who have pursued similar questioning and attempts at reformulating the nature and the roles of curatorial practice, specifically by exploring the shifts that can occur, in thought and in material manifestations, if one displace the terms of discourse from curating to the curatorial.

Irit Rogoff coined the term of 'the curatorial', through which she moves beyond curating considered as an approach focused on an end result to the curatorial that rather embraces a trajectory of 'ongoing, active work'.⁶⁵ Rogoff defines the curatorial as an 'epistemic structure': a 'series of existing knowledges that come together' and produce an event that transcends their individual positions as knowledge.⁶⁶ Although Rogoff acknowledges that it seems necessary to depart from curating in order to become aware of the positions that are conventionally distributed across the field, how power is attributed, how spaces and platforms of display constitute subjects, she insists on the necessity to distinguish between production, which falls on the side of curating as end product, and curatorial work, which allows to envision an open-ended dynamic. The curatorial indeed asserts that curatorial practice can no longer be defined solely through the display of artworks and the making of exhibitions. Curatorial practice expanded its scope in order to integrate artistic practices that increasingly developed across different fields of knowledge, carrying out long-term projects that appeared less object-oriented, more discursive, and sometimes educational. The curatorial, a term that has in turn become central to the discourse produced about curating and by curators, defines

⁶⁵ Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Curating/Curatorial', in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 23

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

the broader conceptual framework of the practice of curating. Curating and the curatorial are characterized by their complex relationship and by their differences. The curatorial can appear as a critical response to the affirmation of the authorial production of curating, and considers curatorial practice through the lens of collective production and collaboration shared between a multiplicity of actors and instigators.

Curator Maria Lind has also acknowledged that the term the curatorial is relevant in its capacity to better define the scope of curating ‘as a way of thinking in terms of interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories and discourses in physical space’.⁶⁷ She argues for an approach to curating and to the figure of the curator that takes distance with reverence towards the work of art, in order to think ‘from the artwork, with it, but also away from it and against it’.⁶⁸ Following the tracks of Lind and Rogoff, Beatrice von Bismarck, editor of *Cultures of the Curatorial*, argues that the term ‘the curatorial’ challenges the controversies between artists and curators on the issues of meaning and its constitution and the privilege of authorship. Bismarck attempts to rethink the status of the exhibition through Bruno Latour’s notion of the collective to move beyond the opposition between subjects (artists, curators) and objects (works of art and artefacts) as well as the opposition between society and nature. Bismarck claims the relevance of considering the exhibition as a work in its own right, yet a work that escapes the logic of commodity by taking into account its constitution as a collective endeavour in Latour’s sense, concluding that ‘rather than fomenting antagonism as the offending object, the exhibition takes over the function of an arena for its negotiation’,⁶⁹ thus affirming the social significance of curatorial practice from a political perspective.

Dorothea von Hantelmann’s contribution to *Cultures of the Curatorial* describes the process of transformation that curatorial practice has undergone as a simple shift from ‘a secondary rather administrative and scholarly task to a creative quasi-artistic practice’.⁷⁰ She thus accounts for the current social significance of curatorial practice through a comparison between the activities of the curator and that of the consumer, defining acts of selecting as central to the production of self-expression and modern subjectivity, as opposed to acts of caretaking and organizing, which by default have been reconsidered as positions of submission deprived of so-called creative output.

⁶⁷ Maria Lind, *Writing* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), 63.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

⁶⁹ Beatrice von Bismarck, ‘The exhibition as collective’, in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, 299.

⁷⁰ Dorothea von Hantelmann, ‘Affluence and choice. The social significance of the curatorial’, in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, 42.

If the curatorial makes it possible to encompass complex networks of actors, issues, and methodologies in approaching the increasing number of available contexts and forms of public exposure for artistic practices, its detractors also denounce the nebulous and elusive characters of its open-ended field of activities. Curator Jens Hoffmann has taken a strong critical stance about what he considers an improper use of the terms curating or curator that have been ‘adopted by all sorts of fields to describe any process that involves making a selection of something’.⁷¹ Hoffmann contests various discourses and practices that summon the terms curating or curatorial. He finds it necessary to connect curatorial practice with the making of exhibitions and affirms that ‘curating is about formulating a certain theory or argument, based upon which one makes a selection of artworks or other objects with the aim of creating an exhibition in which those objects and artworks are displayed to the public’.⁷² Hoffmann is one of very few curators who have provided an antagonist stance regarding the notion of the curatorial; he actually coined the term ‘paracuratorial’, which he defines as ‘curating beyond exhibition making into other mechanisms for making art visible to a public’.⁷³ Hoffmann interestingly describes the ambiguity of the notion of the curatorial and more specifically its unresolved relationship to selection and choice, which Chris Dercon and Dorothea von Hantelmann consider as central to the social significance of curatorial practice. Hoffmann suggests that the definition of the curatorial

... can also be applied to any number of thoughts or things, ultimately forming a nebulous and ill-defined usage of the curatorial as an anything-goes approach to curating that can lead as easily to the curating of art, history and ideas as it does to the curating of menus, shoes, and automobiles.⁷⁴

Hoffmann therefore deplores the proliferation of activities that have come to define curatorial practice under the auspices of the curatorial, claiming that curatorial practice should be more closely related to the display of artworks and the reflective practice of exhibition-making, which, for him, still offers much to be explored and investigated. Hoffmann rather champions an authorial status for the curator of exhibitions, comparing once again the curator (after Heinrich and Pollack) with the auteur in the context of cinema.⁷⁵ Hoffmann points out that his

⁷¹ Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, ‘To Show or not to show’, *Mousse*, Issue #31 (December 2011). Last accessed 10 January 2015. URL: <http://www.moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=759>

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Jens Hoffmann, ‘Curating Between the Lines’, *Critique d’art* [En ligne], 41 | Printemps/Été 2013, mis en ligne le 24 juin 2014, last accessed 22 October 2015. URL : <http://critiquedart.revues.org/8314>

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Hoffmann writes: ‘The term author is used here in a manner similar to how it was used in relation to film directors in the 1950s to draw a parallel between the author-director and the creative writers of that period. The characteristics of an author-director include thematic consistency of production, a strong creative sensibility in

use of the notion of authorship takes for granted the crucial contributions of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault on this subject, thus acknowledging that authorial production can be located in acts of selection:

The creative act being the transformation of chaos into order or in other words the act of selecting against an infinite number of possibilities which is ultimately how we would describe what a curator is, someone who limits, excludes, creates meaning with existing signs, codes and materials. This means within the process of making an exhibition the curator is as a result decentered, only a part of a larger structure, a subject position, and not the core.⁷⁶

Hoffmann's position is central to understand the ambiguity inherent to the definition of the curator as author: on the one hand, he appeals to the creative and authorial nature of the act of selection within the context of exhibition-making, and on the other hand, he condemns the broadening of the definition of curatorial production beyond the limits of the exhibition as a form. Yet I am interested in Hoffmann's reference to the curator as a subject position within a larger structure, and his critical perspective on the shifting from a notion of curatorial/authorial production to a more elusive notion of work produced within the framework of the curatorial. Hoffmann's polemic use of the term 'paracuratorial', which, as O'Neill suggested, 'assumes a binary between primary and secondary curatorial labor' and 'suggests that something is in need of hierarchization,'⁷⁷ is useful in order to declare the concept of the curatorial as a contested site of discussion and point out the necessity for curators or scholars to define their use of such a term.

The concept of 'the curatorial' has been around for some time now — considering that it emerged at the turn of the century — but it continues to fuel discussions among practitioners in artistic and curatorial practice, as well as scholars working in the fields of art and visual cultures. In 2013, Jean-Paul Martinon edited an anthology titled *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, which came out of the ongoing research carried out through the PhD programme Curatorial/Knowledge in the department of Visual Cultures at Goldsmiths College. Such an anthology has been useful in offering new perspectives emerging within a scholarly context driven by practice – some of which have particularly informed my project,

regard to how the director interprets a script, and an apparent artistic development through her/his career from film to film. All of which are attributes that one could apply to some of the curators working today.' (Jens Hoffmann, 'A certain tendency of curating', *Curating Subjects*, 138).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁷⁷ Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', *The Exhibitionist* #6 (June 2012): 55. Last accessed 21 November 2014. URL: <http://the-exhibitionist.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/The-Exhibitionist-issue-6.pdf>

such as the contributions of Sarah Pierce and Stefan Nowotny. Through the contributions of Rogoff and Martinon — who jointly run a PhD programme — the curatorial is affirmed not as term proposed in replacement of the term of curating but as a distinct proposition, an addition to a vocabulary within which a whole set of terms — art, exhibition, curator, audience, performance, etc. — speaks of an ‘epistemological crisis’. To the proliferation of activities that have been subsumed under the term of curating, the curatorial appears as an attempt to provide a critical context to rethink the limits of multiplicity and proliferation in favour of a different notion of expansion, which calls for the undoing of boundaries and separations, the inclusion of absent knowledges and disciplines, and the refusal of any moral inscription. As Rogoff suggests, the curatorial points to a crisis within the field of curating — and more broadly in the field of art — which marks the urgency to challenge existing frames and differently inhabit the infrastructures of the art world in order to work against normativity in the professional and academic fields. She writes:

In addition to art I would designate the terms: ‘practice’, ‘audience’, ‘curator’, ‘space’, ‘exhibition’, ‘performance’, ‘intervention’, ‘education’ and many other terms subjected to this same disorientation – a historically determined meaning which has been pushed at the edges to expand and contain a variety of activity – but never actually allowed to back up on itself and flip over into something entirely different.⁷⁸

Martinon and Rogoff invite all the agents party to the art world to engage in rethinking modes of knowledge, protocols and processes of action, well-oiled infrastructures in order to abandon stable meanings and disrupt all the habitual modes of being, knowing, and doing within the field of curating.

⁷⁸ Irit Rogoff, ‘An expanded field’, in *The Curatorial: a Philosophy of Curating*, Chapter 4, ‘The limits of multiplicity’, page 11, Kindle edition for mac.

Section I.2 — Disrupting existing paradigms: The curator as an attentive spectator and desiring believer

In her essay titled ‘The Simple Operator’, Sarah Pierce affirms the necessity to enquire into the curatorial independently of curating and of the figure of the curator. Following the approach to the curatorial developed by Martinon and Rogoff, Pierce contests the curatorial as a possible field of knowledge of expertise and rather defines it as an approach, a procedure or a methodology, which is both theoretical and material. Pierce suggests a thought-provoking analogy between the curatorial and transparency. She writes:

One cannot be an expert in transparency. It may occur with or without intention, and levels of transparency run through different relationships, but only those relationships that have some degree of publicness. ... Transparency operates within the limits of bureaucracy and institution. ... transparency implies an ethical dimension, but does not guarantee it.⁷⁹

Pierce’s analogy strikingly echoed the curatorial approach developed by Valérie Smith in the context of the exhibition ‘Between Walls and Windows. Architektur und Ideologie’ at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, which I visited in 2012. The exhibition consisted of works by both artists and architects invited by Smith either to show an existing work or to make a new contribution for the specific context of the exhibition. The title of the exhibition, ‘Between Walls and Windows. Architektur und Ideologie’, could be misleading, misread as a thematic proposition; Smith’s curatorial approach was anchored in a subtle form of inhabiting the historical building and cultural institution, putting forward unexpected acts of unveiling and subtracting in the construction of the exhibition. Although I was visiting the building for the first time, I was completely disoriented upon my entrance and immediately sensed that the space had been stripped of all institutional signage, including cashiers and information desks. For the purpose of the exhibition, Smith had given back to the building its original condition as the former Kongresshalle, symbol of the Cold War in Berlin. She removed the cashier at the entrance, thus making the entry free of charge, cut the artificial lights and new signage, and finally opened the building from all sides. In the course of an interview, the interviewers questioned Smith in relation to this curatorial gesture and affirmed, ‘It’s quite clear that you

⁷⁹ Sarah Pierce, ‘The Simple Operator’, in *The Curatorial: a Philosophy of Curating*, Chapter 11, foreword, page 4, Kindle edition for mac.

acted in this case as an artist yourself by creating this sculpture'.⁸⁰ To which Smith then replied,

I do not think it was an artistic act, but a necessary gesture of honesty to prepare the context of the exhibition's argument for the artists and architects who participated.⁸¹ The inaugural gesture that Smith performed as a curator was a gesture of taking away, of clearing up the space of vision: 'there was a lot of visual garbage obfuscating interior perspectives: flyers, cards, signage, furniture, etc.', she added. Through this act, I claim, Smith affirmed a dimension of curatorial practice that is fundamental: spectatorship. Smith affirmed herself first and foremost as a spectator: she emphasized the act of seeing that precedes other gestures, an act of visually investigating the space within which she jointly worked with the artists and architects she had invited. This exhibition, due to its object of reflection and its location, symbolically handled the question of vision; indeed, as Smith remarked, the architecture of the Kongresshalle was intended to be exemplary of the open and free ideology of the building through its idea of transparency and relationship to light.⁸² Smith's first curatorial gesture was to allow herself, the artists, the staff and visitors to have the capacity to see such transparency for themselves, so it could materialize physically rather than remain on the level of a concept and of language. By doing such a thing, she allows others to see for themselves, that is, without her mediation, what she has learned through research and reflection. Smith, however, does not simplistically consider transparency as a way of guaranteeing democracy. She attempts to return to transparency as a fundamental element of the liberal ideology of post-war West Germany, and avoids applying the type of moral judgement that supported the political impulse at the origin of the building. She displaces, however, the idea of transparency in which the architecture of the Kongresshalle originated, and positions it as a necessary point of departure for the exhibition, rather than a point of arrival or destination.

The works in the exhibition were distributed across the entirety of the building, dispersed in a way that made a demand on the spectators to wander and accept a certain sense of

⁸⁰ Interview with curator Valerie Smith by Jacqueline Falk and John Canciani, 'On artistic and Curatorial authorship', *on-curating.org*, Issue 19 (June 2013) Last accessed 12 January 2015. URL: http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-19.html#.VNKKqrZRb_M

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² The square where the Kongresshalle is built was destroyed during the Second World War. It was completed in 1957 in West Berlin at the height of the Cold War in the city where the liberal ideology championed by the US most directly opposed the socialist ideology embodied by the USSR, which occupied East Berlin. The building was a present from the US government to the City of Berlin. As a venue for international encounters, the Kongresshalle was designed as a symbol of 'freedom' in the 'island city' of Berlin. It was conceived as an international meeting place dedicated to knowledge and culture, including theatre, symposia and concerts. (Source: http://hkw.de/en/hkw/geschichte/ort_geschichte/ort.php).

disorientation and uncertainty in regards to the way the works were inserted into the fabric of the building. Smith claims:

It became very clear that the architectural and artistic interventions had to be on the periphery of the building so that the centre could reveal the ideological construction of the program.⁸³

Smith's curatorial proposition explicitly expressed a desire to produce renewed conditions of spectatorship, through which she hoped to allow the spectators to empower themselves of an autonomous vision and mode of thought. I find this intention clearly expressed in Smith's exhibition text, where she writes:

An attempt has been made to "purify" the Haus der Kulturen der Welt, to strip it down to its original design, to rid of the entrance, foyer, and other spaces in the Haus of extra visual distractions – to allow the visitor to experience the building as close as possible to how it was when it was inaugurated in 1957. This act of purification clarifies the ideology of the building, which resides not only in its former name, Kongresshalle, but also in its original function as a mouthpiece for democratic values in former West Berlin.⁸⁴

Hereby, I understand her use of the term democracy in the sense that Jacques Rancière has repeatedly stated, in which democracy is considered as a common stage for speech, through which all speaking subjects are equal as speaking subjects and thus able to qualify an object of discussion as such; a common stage within which the community as a whole acknowledges the primacy of the ability to disagree.⁸⁵ In her proposition, Smith does not absent herself but forcefully commits herself as a curator through her choices of existing works and specific commissions to artists as well as architects. This curatorial engagement reveals a singular perspective on what both architecture and exhibiting architecture can mean. The act of exhibiting materializes through multifarious contributions and thus appears decisively polysemous. Smith literally stripped down the signage, artificial lights, and furniture thus exposing, understood as uncovering and laying bare, the original architectural structure. One-time collaborators artist Damián Ortega, architect Mauricio Rocha and philosopher Arturo Romero Contreras made interventions throughout the building, commenting precise points

⁸³ Interview with curator Valerie Smith by Jacqueline Falk and John Canciani, 'On artistic and Curatorial authorship', *on-curating.org*, Issue 19 (June 2013).

⁸⁴ Valérie Smith, *Between Walls and Windows: Architektur und Ideologie* (Berlin: Hantje Cantz, 2012), 9. Exhibition catalogue.

⁸⁵ Jacques Rancière, *la Méésentente : Politique et Philosophie* (Paris : Galilée, 1995).

where this ideology might be recognizable, thus addressing the spectators' own vision politically in the architectonic language of the Kongresshalle.

With *fm-scenario – where palms stand – mask – delay*, artist Eran Schaerf staged an ongoing performance in the Konferenzraum (conference room) that could be watched from the five interpreters' booths above where Schaerf also installed monitors, which at first seem to stream live what was going on downstairs yet soon revealed its distinct temporalities, thus playing with these possible disjunctions and the questions they carry. [Fig 1 — 2] Smith writes:

fm-scenario – where palms stand – mask – delay deconstructs the concept of communication as an elaborate architecture of representation, interpretation, approximation, and subjectification in relation to direct speech and lived experience. While the original information may be based in such things as reality and truth, they do not exist here.⁸⁶

Other contributions addressed the possibility of exhibiting architecture on a symbolic level, such as the architect Arno Brandhuber's gesture of installing a reception of orchids at the entrance of the building. Visiting North Korea in 2008, Brandhuber had noticed many posters featuring the flower in the capital of Pyongyang. His work in the exhibition attempted to convey the symbolic relationship between the orchid, representative of a form of engineered perfection via technology and hybridization, and the figure of the President, of the State, and of the ideology they embody. [Fig 3 — 4] But others like Wang Shu with Lu Wenyu of Amateur Architecture Studio built an additional architectural structure on the periphery of the Haus: *Tile Theater* recycled materials from their previous work in the Venice Biennale. The ephemeral construction appeared as a temporary stage for unregulated activities, a space of escape, simultaneously in and out of the main structure of the building, existing adjacently. [Fig 5 — 6] Smith's curatorial proposition authorizes itself to address the relationships between architecture and ideology through poetry, performance, and fiction, materialized throughout the exhibition as an expanded approach to architecture that refused the possibility of cataloguing and historicizing, but rather enacted her complex process of vision and thought in the attempt to enable spectators with a similar desire to think anew, departing from all the distinct propositions of the participants.

⁸⁶ Smith, *Between Walls and Windows: Architektur und Ideologie*, 16.

Evidently I was strongly impressed by Smith's curatorial proposition because the emphasis on spectatorship and vision that I experienced in this project echoed a crucial methodological question that I had been dealing. Indeed, in the context of this doctoral project, I have proposed to examine curatorial practice in its relationship with artistic practice, leaving aside the relationship with the audience. In the attempt at legitimating this decision and becoming aware of its consequences for the definition of my project, which focuses on the figure of the curator, it became evident that the audience as a separate constituency could not be part of this thesis because spectatorship played an integral role in how I perceived the conditions of curatorial practice. The curator was a spectator and as such already embodied what one understands the audience to be. In fact, in the following section, I will try to argue that the audience as a coherent and separate constituency does not exist; it can only be constituted by a multitude of individual spectators, further opening up the possibility for the invention of new forms of collectivity in the context of curatorial practice. In the sections that follow, I will argue that the spectator is not a role that could remain stable in time; spectatorship refers to a singular trajectory. Thus I will claim it necessary to consider spectatorship as a fundamental dimension of curatorial practice in order to define its relationship with artistic practice. My attempt to position curatorial practice in proximity with the figure of the spectator has the ambition of considering curatorial practice through its own condition of spectatorship. I will question the competence and symbolic roles assigned to the spectator in the context of contemporary artistic practices, and will engage with current debates on the figure of the spectator and its possible emancipation. Within the bounds of this thesis, I will try to examine the transformation of the roles and competencies assigned to the figure of the spectator, considering how changes that have affected the figure of the spectator might have also simultaneously affected curatorial practice. I will attempt to argue the specificity of curatorial practice's relationship to spectatorship, claiming that curatorial practice puts forward a singular practice of spectatorship in its conscious deployment of desire, will, and attention.

I will also demonstrate that it is necessary to question within curatorial practice how one conceives the act of looking — and more specifically the distance that might exist between looking and knowing — as well as the notion of vision, which allows to expand the act of sensing with the eyes in order to include the possibilities of other experiences, such as dreams or hallucinations. The physical body plays a crucial role in the experience of viscosity, in which both spectator and curator partake. I will thus attempt to engage with the problem of vision through the writing of Michel de Certeau on the fifteenth-century philosopher Nicholas

of Cusa (1401–1464), and Jonathan Crary and, thanks to them, envisage vision as an instrument of intellectual speculation that can entertain close ties with forms of belief which are significant to how perception might be invested in curatorial practice.

Section I.2.1 — A contested concept of spectatorship

In his essay titled ‘The emancipated spectator’, Jacques Rancière describes the tensions currently at work within the notion of spectatorship. Rancière underlines the traditional opposition between looking and knowing, considering the spectator as ‘separated from the capacity of knowing just as he is separated from the possibility of acting’ and thus stressing the association between spectatorship, passivity and incompetence.⁸⁷ Rancière however confronts a notion of spectatorship with a notion of observation, which summons a different quality in the act of looking. In the conventional assumption that distinguishes the contemporary spectator from the observer, the passive viewer faces an active investigator, whose capacity of attention and observation are comparable with that of a scientist. Rancière nevertheless remarks that the notion of spectatorship is fuelled by contradictions: on the one hand, a classical perspective demands that the spectator take a more distant position regarding their object of interest in order to adopt a critical stance and fulfil his or her role of judge and interpreter; and yet, on the other hand, contemporary artistic and institutional practices appear to place opposite demands on the spectator, asking of him or her to actively engage, which might imply the necessity to invest more fully and, in order to act, reduce the distance that separates the viewer from this very object. Rancière unmasks a series of equivalences that assign specific qualities and competencies to certain functions and roles: one assumes that the general spectator is incompetent and passive and has to be taught, through pedagogy, how to position themselves in relation to the artwork, what knowledge is necessary to access the work and how he or she might be able to mobilise their own imagination and capacity of invention. Rancière therefore confronts this distribution of roles and competencies and this conception of the movement from incompetence towards competence through pedagogy by presenting a fundamentally different conception of emancipation.

Emancipation is the process of verification of the equality of intelligence. The equality of intelligence is not the equality of all manifestations of intelligence. It is the equality of intelligence in all its manifestations.⁸⁸

Rancière questions the very notion of distance inherent to the condition of passivity conventionally associated with spectatorship in the contemporary context. He writes:

Why not think, in this case too, that it is precisely the attempt at suppressing the distance that constitutes the distance itself? Why identify the fact of being seated

⁸⁷ Jacques Rancière, ‘The Emancipated spectator’, *Artforum* (March 2007): 272

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 275

motionless with inactivity, if not by the presupposition of a radical gap between activity and inactivity? Why identify looking with passivity if not by the presupposition that looking means looking at the image or the appearance, that it means being separated from the reality that is always behind the image?⁸⁹

Rancière thus proposes to re-examine the condition of spectatorship and invests it from the perspective of capacity. Rather than condemning the spectator, Rancière calls into question the homogeneity of transmission at work within different cultural contexts and convokes a multiplicity of possible mediations.

How is Rancière's argument on spectatorship relevant to contemporary curatorial practice? To begin answering this question, it is useful to turn to the writing of French philosopher Christian Ruby — commentator on Rancière's work.⁹⁰ The figure of the spectator is a figure distinct from the general audience; focusing on the spectator confirms the decision to put aside the other figures of collective bodies, such as community, audience, or people.

Considering the condition of spectatorship leads to an examination of the relationship between the work of art and the spectator. If one agrees that spectatorship as such does not refer to one specific condition, but rather encompasses multiple possible trajectories that demonstrate the changing relationships that an individual entertains with works of art, then one can consider spectatorship not as designating a fixed role — as we may do when we contrast the roles of artist, curator and spectator, for example — but rather as a form of experience that is shared between different actors within the art world, such as, and very precisely so, curators. Tracing back the notion of spectatorship through European history since the eighteenth century, Ruby proposes that the spectator has consistently been a contested figure, exposing the disagreements and desires that it has fuelled across the positions of different thinkers such as Denis Diderot, Charles Baudelaire, Theodor W. Adorno, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, among others. Ruby proposes to sketch out the essential transformations of these conditions since the figure of the spectator was born in the eighteenth century. He argues that in the classical period (eighteenth and nineteenth centuries), the figure of the spectator is conceived as an aesthetic subject that considers their encounter with the work of art as an individual confrontation: the spectator attempts to position himself at the right distance to the work in order to let him or herself be addressed by the work and in turn, attempts to train their gaze in order to decipher the work and produce an aesthetic judgement.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 277

⁹⁰ Christian Ruby, *L'Interruption. Jacques Rancière et la politique* (Paris : la fabrique, 2009)

Thereby, the figure of the spectator identifies him or herself as a centred and unique subject. However, Ruby pays particular attention to Denis Diderot's writings concerning the conditions of spectatorship in the eighteenth century, which have exerted a significant influence on Ruby's own rethinking of the figure of the spectator in the contemporary context. Ruby argues that Diderot questions in his writings the desire that leads someone towards a work of art: he intends to conceive the empirical conditions of reception of the work of art, questioning how one positions his or her body in relation to the work and how the work affects our sense of pleasure. He wonders if we need to acquire knowledge in order to enjoy the work and evokes the possibility for different positions and tastes to be confronted and to diverge. Ruby stresses that in Diderot's thinking, spectatorship embodies the perception of the multiplicity of possible relationships through which spectators encounter works of art. Spectatorship implies 'a judgement that materializes the emotional encounter between an exercise of sensibility and an object by bringing the subject towards artistic knowledge.'⁹¹ For Ruby, although Diderot's conception is representative of a classical form of spectatorship in regards to the modes of representation available in the 18th century, his theory of the spectator brings forward a set of questions — about the relationships between subject and object, and the nature and consequences of their encounter — that is fundamental to the present time. Ruby emphasizes that Diderot does not conceive spectatorship on the basis of an opposition between incompetence and competence, but on the basis of 'variability and multiplicity'.⁹²

Ruby argues that contemporary artistic practices have radically transformed the conditions of spectatorship, characterized as a theory of multiplicity, and by a variation of positions taken within public space. The spectator is not only produced through a confrontation with works of art but also alongside other spectators: spectatorship therefore has the potential to produce dissensus and contribute to the production of a public space in a political sense. For Ruby, contemporary art practices — the author does not propose to distinguish between different practices or approaches — profoundly unsettle classical and modern conventional forms of spectatorship by interfering with the distance between the work and the spectator, demanding that the spectator interacts or participates within the work; no longer addressing an individual spectator but provoking modes of exchange between spectators, organizing forms of movement, soliciting other sensory functions beyond vision. I would argue that Ruby's linear

⁹¹ Christian Ruby, *La figure du spectateur, Eléments d'histoire culturelle européenne*, (Paris: Amand Colin, 2012), 67 (Translation is mine).

⁹² *Ibid.*, 69.

approach to contemporary practices as an unproblematic and coherent ensemble, altogether oriented towards an unsettling of classical and modern conditions of spectatorship, lacks precision and thus demands a more precise positioning in regards to specific practices. Nevertheless I wish to pay interest to the notion of ‘interference’, which he employs to describe how contemporary practices transform the conditions of spectatorship. Interference qualifies the way contemporary artistic practices intervene in the space and time of the encounter between the work and the spectator. These practices affect the traditional confrontation with the work, breaking away from the notion of a common signification or body of knowledge acquired in relation to the work. The gap these practices create with an individual and confrontational encounter forces an exchange between spectators. Ruby claims that contemporary practices no longer address a classical subject, considered as centred and unique, but conceive of a decentred, multiple, and dispersed subject. This contemporary condition, according to Ruby, takes into account our capacity to acquire new competencies: there is an idea of a becoming-spectator, exercising oneself to acquire new skills in order ‘to make works visible or audible, and therefore sayable’.⁹³ For Ruby, this spectator again ‘learns to displace this place by constantly undoing in him or herself the very possibility of a singular place’.⁹⁴ Ruby thus conceives the spectator as a trajectory, which is defined through dissensus in the context of its relationships with other spectators, and which is considered as a varying set of functions in space and time. Referring to philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Rancière, Ruby considers the spectator within the context of different spectatorial functions and trajectories, and distinct models of rationality. The spectator essentially appears as plastic, capable of change (of role, place, function), acquiring new competencies through a variety of exercises and experiences. Ruby claims that the spectator should consider their trajectory as ceaselessly in transformation, a transformation that moreover affects him or her as a subject. In this context, Ruby suggests that it is essential for the spectator to move beyond the opposition between spectatorship, considered as an ineffectual and futile activity, and social or political action. Ruby assigns a positive value to the variety of exercises, movements, and multiple forms of participation that contemporary practices propose. Yet he also distinguishes these multiple exercises in which spectators engage with another form of participation that is complicit with society’s engulfment into consumption and reduction of culture into playful activity and spectacle. In

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 276.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 276.

this mode of participation, Ruby argues, the subject is no longer decentred and dispersed but rather dissolved into massive audiences and crowds.

‘Far from being oppositional to spectacle, participation has now entirely merged with it’, concludes Claire Bishop in the final chapter of *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*.⁹⁵ In her book, Bishop’s critical perspective on participation and so-called ‘participatory art’ challenges different forms of consensual discourses that elicit active involvement of contemporary art audiences. Throughout her research, Bishop studied a set of current situations as well as historical artistic practices and experiments going back to the early twentieth century. Participation is understood through Bishop’s research as a form of artistic practice ‘in which people constitute the central artistic medium and material, in the manner of theatre and performance’.⁹⁶ Bishop attempts to provide a much broader historical perspective on artistic phenomena that may at first appear novel and unprecedented. Her critical aim throughout the different chapters of her book was to question ‘the meaning of what [participatory art] produces rather than attending solely to process’.⁹⁷ She indeed affirms that most literature on the subject — often produced by the curators embedded in the projects concerned — focuses on detailed descriptions of complex processes central to participatory art projects. Bishop thus insists on the urgency of ‘an analysis of the politics of spectatorship, even — and especially — when participatory art wishes to disavow this’.⁹⁸ One of Bishop’s central disagreements with the existing discourses on participatory art relies on a general acceptance of an assumed and unquestioned political dimension of any artistic project, calling on social values and forms of collective production. She blames the different actors involved in participatory art projects for producing a new set of norms and means of consensus. She thus claims that participation, although it intends to deny spectatorship, and more specifically deny the traditional role of the spectator understood as a passive viewer or beholder, in fact only produces a new normative framework for contemporary art audiences.⁹⁹ As a critique of an increasingly capitalistic model of artistic production, which privileges the individualization of artistic practice and the production of financial value, Bishop argues that ‘collective

⁹⁵ Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: participatory art and the politics of spectator* (London: Verso, 2012), 277.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁹ Bishop writes in her introduction: ‘To put it simply: the artist is conceived less as an individual producer of discrete objects than as a collaborator and producer of situations. The work of art as a finite, portable, commodifiable product is reconceived as an on-going or long-term project with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a ‘viewer’ or ‘beholder’, is now repositioned as a co-producer or participant.’ *Ibid.*, 2.

practice is perceived to offer an automatic counter-model of social unity, regardless of its actual politics'.¹⁰⁰ Bishop contends with the simplistic antagonism between artistic practices based on individual authorship and the production of objects, and artistic practices based on collective authorship, participation, and the production of situations. Bishop claims that, based on such criteria, artistic practices are solely evaluated on the basis of ethical content. On the one hand, this might lead to ruling out 'artistic strategies of disruption, intervention or over-identification ... as 'unethical' because all forms of authorship are equated with authority';¹⁰¹ and on the other hand, we are led to judge the extent of participatory art's success on the basis of social good, which is what cultural policies have been implementing in the wake of the transformation of the model of the welfare state in Europe since the late 1980s. Bishop thus maintains the importance of a distinction between the political and the ethical dimensions of artistic practice, affirming that there is no reliable and necessary relation between them. She emphasizes the fundamental aesthetic dimension of any artistic practice, including ones that call for participation, collaboration, collective authorship, and engagement with the social realm. Referring to the philosophical contribution of Jacques Rancière on the relationships between aesthetics and politics, Bishop insists on the autonomy of the experience of art, rather than the autonomy of the art object.¹⁰² The autonomous character of this experience, and the freedom attached to its singularity — any subject, any material, and any viewer — infer, according to Rancière, 'the possibility of politics (understood here as dissensus)'.¹⁰³ Bishop places importance on the dimensions of art practice that appear in total opposition to the consensual and moralizing strategies prominent to artistic practices that claim forms of social and political engagement.¹⁰⁴ She draws on notions of perversion, enjoyment, desire, disruption, paradox and negation,¹⁰⁵ which she describes as operations 'as

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁰² Bishop refers to Rancière's definition of the aesthetic regime of art and the relationships he draws between aesthetics and politics. Bishop recalls: 'The aesthetic regime of art, ushered in with the Enlightenment, continues today. It permits everything to be a potential subject or material for art, everyone to be a potential viewer of this art, and denotes the aesthetic as an autonomous form of life.' (*Ibid.*, 29)

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 27.

Indeed Rancière argues that 'the autonomy of the aesthetic experience, which establishes the idea of Art as an autonomous reality, comes together with the suppression of any pragmatic criteria separating the domain of art from the domain of non-art, the solitude of the work of art and the collective forms of life.' (Jacques Rancière, *Malaise dans l'esthétique* (Paris: Galilée, 2004), 60, Translation is mine)

¹⁰⁴ Bishop attempts here to go beyond Rancière's proposition and thus points out a possible pitfall, remarking that, following his argument, any work of art whatsoever could be political. And yet, she also stresses that Rancière himself took a critical stance regarding a form of instrumentalisation of ethics leading to a collapse of political and aesthetic dissensus — in favour of moralisation and consensus.

¹⁰⁵ Claire Bishop brings forward example of works by artists such as Santiago Sierra or Artur Zmijewski.

crucial to aesthesis as dissensus is to political'.¹⁰⁶ Bishop insists on the necessity to consider more critically the possible connections between the individual and the collective rather than simply condemning individual authorship and spectatorship as symbols of power, oppression, and alienation. She brings to the fore the contradictory values carried by social and artistic discourse, and thus underlines the necessity for art to call into question any value system. Participation is nothing in and of itself: it always intimately depends on the artistic context in which it is engaged. Bishop recalls:

We can chart this as a shift from an audience that demands a role (expressed as hostility towards avant-garde artists who keep control of the proscenium), to an audience that enjoys its subordination to strange experiences devised for them by an artist, to an audience that is encouraged to be a co-producer of the work.¹⁰⁷

Bishop states that in many cases, participatory art 'presents itself as oppositional to visual art by trying to side-step the question of visibility';¹⁰⁸ on the contrary, she asserts importance in the coexistence of participation and spectatorship, thus claiming the necessity of a 'third term' — the spectacle or work itself — considered as a form of possible mediation between the multiple actors and agents involved — artists, curators, participants, spectators, etc.¹⁰⁹

For Christophe Kihm, participation and interaction are also the central modalities of spectatorship that emerged through contemporary practices, and transformed the symbolic role of the spectator to overcome distance through action. For Kihm, contemporary artistic as well as institutional practices make a demand on the spectator to be ready to play an active part in an experience and be available for an experiment. And yet for Kihm, the assumption that the spectator of contemporary art has moved from an assumed passive position to an active one is little problematized. Kihm differently unfolds a series of problems and questions regarding this contemporary figure of the spectator considered as actively involved in the work of art. Kihm wonders at which stage of the process the spectator becomes (actively) involved in the making of the work. He traces the transformation of the symbolic role assigned to the spectator to two distinct models; on the one hand, a model of the spectator exemplified through Marcel Duchamp's statement that 'the observer makes the work'; and on

¹⁰⁶ Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 40.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 277.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 284.

¹⁰⁹ Bishop makes here again a direct reference to Rancière's discussion on spectatorship and emancipation. Rancière asserts that the spectacle, or performance — or the book in the context of learning in the framework of school — is distinct from both the artist and the spectator. The performance has its own distance to both: it simultaneously links artist and spectator, and it separates them.

the other hand, the spectator/reader of the ‘open work’ of Umberto Eco or of the ‘writerly text’ of Roland Barthes, both of whom consider the reader as a producer of signification. Nevertheless for Kihm, the displacement of the role of the spectator in these models is ethical rather than aesthetic. In the specific context of contemporary artistic practices, Kihm questions the models of active spectatorship within the theoretical contributions of Nicolas Bourriaud and Jean-Louis Boissier, and their attempt at theorizing the demands of participation and interactivity from the 1990s onwards.¹¹⁰ Kihm writes:

The measure of distance, proper to the definition of the competence of the spectator in art is displaced into the participant’s capacity to respond within the interactive dispositif of relational aesthetics and of relation as form.¹¹¹

For Kihm, both models fail at distinguishing between the symbolic and the real effects of participation, resulting in privileging a situation of communication above aesthetic and political agency. He thus argues that, although the role assigned to the spectator appears to be dramatically transformed through contemporary artistic practices — moving the spectator from a passive position to an active one — this transformation only symbolically affects the physical relationship between the spectator and the work.¹¹² In both models, the spectator is subjected to a position that is assigned to him or her through the dispositif. Kihm writes:

The spectator is thus stuck between two opposite positions: on the one hand, he never experiments (because he is inexperienced), on the other hand, he always experiments (because he can be experimented).¹¹³

Kihm therefore asks:

What would thus be, for the spectator, an experiment that would neither respond to the imperative of effective action demanded by a process of production, nor to the potential actualizations of programmed data within a technical dispositif, nor to symbolic games of distribution of roles and places?¹¹⁴

He begins to respond to his own question by suggesting that certain contemporary practices, rather than demanding the spectator’s interaction and participation, conceive of their work in

¹¹⁰ Kihm specifically refers to the essays written by Nicolas Bourriaud gathered in the publication titled *Esthétique relationnelle* (Dijon: les Presses du réel, 1998) and to the researches led by Jean-Louis Boissier presented in the publication titled *La relation comme forme. L’interactivité en art* (Genève: MAMCO, 2004).

¹¹¹ Christophe Kihm, ‘Le spectateur expérimenté’, in *In Actu. De l’expérimental dans l’art*, ed. Elie During, Laurent Jeanpierre, Christophe Kihm, Dork Zabunyan (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2009), 349 (Translation is mine).

¹¹² Notions of passivity and activity are here used in their customary definition, which appears here as caricatures through their unchallenged incarnation of stable and opposite values.

¹¹³ Kihm, ‘Le spectateur expérimenté’, 350.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 351.

the context of an encounter with the spectator that may not occur. The nature of the encounter with the art object would dramatically vary according to the spectator's capacity to be attentive: Is the spectator available? Is he or she willing to give attention? Do they have the desire to engage in an encounter with the work of art? Does the work need a spectator to exist? The artistic practices that Kihm believe transform the conditions of spectatorship are practices that introduce, alongside vision, other modes of attention; for example, our capacity to listen. These artistic practices allow themselves to invent an art that can exist without spectators, or an art that does not address the spectator defined in its classical sense. The shift that occurs when artistic practices call upon other senses and modes of attention is, according to Kihm, a 'transformation of an experience of the sensible that connects aesthetics and politics'.¹¹⁵

An example of such artistic practice emerges in Tate Modern curator Catherine Wood's observation of the work of choreographer Boris Charmatz. Wood argues that Charmatz's artistic practice both demands and offers different qualities of attention. Wood considers that Charmatz acts upon the conditions of spectatorship in a variety of ways: through the habitual means of choreographing his and other dancers' bodies, he intervenes in the encounter between the work and the spectators through using the physical space otherwise, inventing different dispositifs that, for example, almost completely do away with the distance that separates one group from the other, or that question the theatre's traditional idea of the collective by letting spectators enter the space of the performance one after the other gradually. Yet Wood demonstrates that Charmatz not only alters the conditions of perception, vision, and experience of his work, but also revisions the reciprocal roles of watching and performing, which, for the author, 'does not offer benign relational "democracy", but demonstrates that audience and performer are bound intensely together in a peculiar asymmetric contact'.¹¹⁶ Moreover, Charmatz imagines the spectators' potential displacement into the dancer's own experience through the invention of exercises that explore the capacity of the body (as 'any-body').

In a two-page text titled 'Personal Meltdown' (1999), Charmatz proposes a movement exercise: 'Starting from the upright position ... let yourself 'melt down' to the heaviest spread-out position — effecting the habitual passage from the vertical to the horizontal

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 339.

¹¹⁶ Catherine Wood, 'Boris Charmatz: an architecture of attention', *Afterall* n°37 (autumn/winter 2014): 131.

then, only this time with no habitus and in an exceptionally drawn-out way'. The aim, he continues, is to allow 'unplanned circulations to occur'.¹¹⁷

In Charmatz's choreographic pieces, Wood claims that spectators are therefore confronted with situations that 'open up a space of attention'. She writes:

Philosopher and scientist David Bohm, in *On Dialogue* (2014), uses the term 'attention' in this way to suggest a mode of apprehending reality that is distinct from thought. Thinking, for Bohm, involves understanding the world through a restricted pattern shaped by language; attention is a way of experiencing the world as passive observation — a process that might allow us to suspend the polarities and opinions that language's logic engenders and apprehend what he describes as the "unrestricted" or the "unlimited" (a notion which for him touches the potentially spiritual aspect of the nature of human existence).¹¹⁸

Bohm's approach to passivity differs here from the customary definition of passivity, to which I referred to earlier. Passivity here emerges as a more complex and paradoxical concept, which I will further develop in the following chapter. Through her reference to Bohm and Charmatz, Wood challenges traditional concepts for the acquisition of knowledge and experience, as well as spectatorship. Wood invited Charmatz to displace his Musée de la Danse,¹¹⁹ or 'dancing museum', to Tate Modern, enquiring into the possibility for Charmatz's practice to challenge Tate's own habitual approach to spectatorship, specifically regarding the possible scope of relationships that connect human beings with material objects, with space, with duration, and with others. [Fig 7 – 8 – 9]

In order to further explore the role that attention can play in challenging the traditional opposition between activity and passivity, participation and spectatorship, it might be necessary here to return to Jacques Rancière. In *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Rancière

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁹ Le Musée de la Danse is the project led by choreographer Boris Charmatz since 2009 in the context of his directorship of the Centre chorégraphique national de Rennes. It departs from a foundational contradiction: imagining the possible points of encounter between the concept of the museum, which embodies ideas of materiality, classification and conservation, and the concept of dance, which designates ideas of movement, action and immateriality. Musée de la Danse addresses questions specific to the transformations inherent to the discipline of dance: its relation to materiality, documentation or historiography. In his project, Charmatz put forward the necessity for contemporary dance to rethink its relationship to experimentation, pedagogy and reflexion and conceived of a working context that would be simultaneously a physical space where different activities could take place, and a nomadic idea, a concept that could be experienced in other locations and contexts, such as Tate Modern. With *If Tate Modern was Musée de la Danse?*, which took place on May 15th and 16th 2015, choreographer Charmatz proposed taking over Tate Modern – including the Turbine Hall as well as a large number of collection galleries –; letting performers' bodies take over a multiplicity of spaces; exposing a variety of dance forms, some of which integrated large number of untrained bodies and engaged the participation of the audience; transforming, albeit temporarily, aspects of the museum infrastructure.

attempts to demonstrate that between human beings, there is an equality of all manifestations of intelligence. Rancière's equality of all the manifestations of intelligence shows an effort to undo traditional views on the relationship between equality and inequality, considering equality as an ideal that society takes as an impossible achievement, and conceives of inequality as a given that can only be reduced and contained. Rancière takes the example of two brothers who have the same age and follow the same classes at school. Despite sharing the same education and cultural background, one is more successful at school than the other. Rancière stresses that this fact — the fact that one is more successful at school than the other — is used as an argument that therefore one is more intelligent than the other, thus proving that despite having the same social and cultural background, they are not equally intelligent. For Rancière, one needs to go back to the fact that one is more successful at school than the other, which is the only tangible fact. Inequality cannot be logically deducted from this situation. For Rancière, the only thing that can allow us to go further into reasoning is attention. He writes:

I will not say that he has done less well because he is less intelligent. I will say that he has perhaps produced a poorer work because he has worked more poorly, that he has not seen well because he hasn't looked well. I will say that he has brought less attention to his work.¹²⁰

It seems fundamental to emphasize that Rancière connects attention with vision; if attention appears in direct correlation with needs in the early stages of life, it later becomes about will and desire. In this context, Rancière acknowledges the importance of attention, will and desire, in sustaining the manifestations of intelligence. Again, vision, according to Rancière, plays a central role: 'Intelligence's act is to see and to compare what has been seen'.¹²¹ Years before his reflections on spectatorship, Rancière had already paved the way for its rethinking by giving such an important role to vision as well as to attention in the movement of intelligence at work.

¹²⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster. Five lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 50.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 55.

Section I.2.2 — Spectators, observers, visionaries, seers, believers

For Kihm, there is a model of spectatorship based on an opposition of competence and incompetence.

The competent spectator and the incompetent spectator thus share the same place and the same situation in space, but from one to the other a difference of capacity in deciphering signs affirms itself.¹²²

In this model, competence is traditionally associated with knowledge and critical distance, and in the context of contemporary artistic practices it is bound with activity through participation and interaction. In both simplistic models, on a scale that would go from incompetence to competence, we might say that the figure of the curator embodies the model of a hyper competent spectator: in the classical context, this hyper competent figure is embodied by the museum curator highly trained in art history; and in the contemporary context, this hyper competent curator is the active producer and collaborator. And yet, if we agree with Rancière's evaluation of such a distribution of the sensible, such unquestioned competence must be completely turned on its head, forcing us to inquire what this competence prevents the curator from being, seeing, or doing. In the context of changing conditions of spectatorship in response to the transformation of artistic practices, what happens to curatorial practice? How is curatorial practice affected by the transformations of the modes of encounter between spectators and works of art? What does it mean for curatorial practice to question its relationship to competence, to knowledge, and to critique, in favour of a different regime of attention?

The possibility of envisioning a different regime of attention and of action in the context of curatorial practice has emerged as a central concern of my doctoral project, bridging the gap between the written component of my project and its practical, material counterpart.

Imagining such a differentiated regime began with the withdrawal inherent to the practice of writing, which forced me to take a step back in relation to other curatorial activities, making me more of a spectator, or slowed-down actor, in the context of the professional world of curating. The change of perspective caused by the solitary conditions of extended periods of reading and writing transformed my mode of attention, making my concentration more acute, yet I was unable to rapidly shift my focus and handle multiple tasks at once as I had before. The differentiated regime of attention and of action that I began to imagine in the course of writing this doctoral project envisioned a different register of encounter with artistic practice.

¹²² Kihm, 'Le spectateur expérimenté', 339.

I will attempt to argue in the following section, through reading and writing the works by Jonathan Crary and Michel de Certeau, that this encounter is founded on an expanded approach to vision, which branches out into invisibility, hallucination, and belief.

The figures of the curator and of the spectator share a common investment in the act of looking, which is essential to artistic practices that belong to the field of the visual arts. The art historian Jonathan Crary has contributed numerous and in-depth studies on the origins of modern visual culture, and has specifically engaged with the issue of perception; starting in the nineteenth century his research extends up until the current period.¹²³

In his on-going research, he considers ‘spectacle’ as a constellation of forces and institutions, and as a multiplicity of techniques. Crary leaves the term ‘spectator’ aside in favour of the term of ‘observer’, and this shift in language points toward a fundamental change in the notions of perception and vision as a consequence of scientific innovation, and toward a shared interest between scientific and artistic experiments. Crary investigates the coming into being of the figure of the modern observer and his or her relation with notions of attention and perception. He writes:

The observer is simultaneously the object of knowledge and the object of procedures of stimulation and normalization, which have the essential capacity to produce experience for the subject.¹²⁴

Crary demonstrates that in the nineteenth century, the human body, ‘whose exclusion was one of the foundations of classical theories of vision and optics’, was reinstated by the question of perception and lead to the affirmation of the ‘visionary’ capacities of the body.¹²⁵ Crary’s research brings to light the crucial role played by the body of the observer or the spectator in the act of looking and in perception, which led to the collapse of the distinction between inner and outer vision. This renewed notion of vision maps the transcendental onto the empirical, thereby undoing the stability of the real, lifting historical codes and conventions, and allowing new positions on the subject of visual experience to be taken. Crary considers this integration of the body of the observer into the question of vision as an ‘opacity or carnal density’ that

¹²³ Jonathan Crary has developed an extended study on the origins of modern visual culture, which he began with *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (1990) and continued to pursue with *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (2000). Most recently, he published *24/7: late capitalism and the ends of sleep* (2013), which examines the fate of human perception within the operations of global information and communication networks.

¹²⁴ Jonathan Crary, ‘Modernizing vision’, in *Vision and visibility*, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998), 41.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

has the inherent possibility to misperceive and thus open up the field of vision to a variety of artistic experimentations, as well as new forms of domination through a series of techniques that attempt to regulate and control this new autonomous vision. He writes:

The subjective vision that endowed the observer with a new perceptual autonomy and productivity was simultaneously the result of the observer having been made into a subject of new knowledge, of new techniques of power.¹²⁶

Crary also writes:

The democratization and mass dissemination of techniques of illusion simply collapsed that older model of power onto a single human subject, transforming each observer into simultaneously the magician and the deceived.¹²⁷

He thus uncovers two fundamentally contradictory paths for the observer who, on the one hand, could potentially be empowered by a notion of vision liberated from the idea of objectivity, while on the other hand, might become subjected to new instruments of vision that control the spectator's gaze through the production of new codified experiences, keeping a tight rein on other possibilities for vision. Crary thus shows that, in the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the so-called modern period, the idea of a subjective vision, understood as a phenomena of perception that defies objectivity, became an object of scientific experiments and knowledge. Subjective vision thus acquires a newly secularized and rationalized role in modern society. Although Crary demonstrates that subjective vision appears normalized through its introduction within the field of knowledge, I believe that Crary's demonstration of the acceptance of the subjective dimension of vision in the modern period allows us to consider the relevance of an expanded notion of subjective vision such as it was previously deployed in non-scientific contexts, for both artistic and curatorial practice, as well as for the practice of the spectator. Yet Crary explores the persisting tensions between the subject of visual experience and the external stimuli to which he or she is exposed. He thus investigates how perceptual experiences engender and reinforce processes of subjectification, as well as threaten the integrity of the subject through phenomena of attention-overload. Crary affirms the necessity to focus our attention on particular objects and thus consciously make parts of the perceptual field unperceived.¹²⁸ His profound rethinking of the role of attention in the

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

¹²⁷ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the observer: on vision and modernity in the nineteenth century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT, 1990), 133.

¹²⁸ In this regard, the work pursued by art historian Timothy J. Clark, published as *The sight of death: an experiment in art writing* (New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2006), emerged as a provocative and relevant example of an attempt at sustaining one's attention for a work of art – more specifically two paintings by Nicolas Poussin.

production of subjectivity and his resistance regarding the perceptual overload that we are confronted with in the context of our daily use of new information technologies are central for curatorial practice. Curators are exposed to both perceptual overload, confronted to flow of images and information sustained by a plurality of media, and infrastructure overload, in relation to a proliferation of exhibitions, fairs, biennials, and other numerous events.¹²⁹ The question that has gradually emerged is the nature of such an overload of both perception and infrastructures: how do curators engage with such flows of images and information, or with the multiplicity of infrastructures proposing, if not demanding, that they attend to the events that they organize? I claim that these forms of exposure are excessive and generate the necessity for curators to decide how to engage with such abundance. Curators are confronted with choices regarding how much they should see and attend, as well as what they should see and attend. In his context, I would claim that excess and intensity do not overlap: while overload and excess might adequately describe the quantity of works and events that curators can browse; the intensity of curatorial spectatorship might describe a different quality of observation and engagement.

In his writing on the work of German philosopher Nicholas of Cusa (1401–1464), Michel de Certeau brings to light the notion of intense observation, focused on the object as a point of departure for thinking and discourse. For Certeau, in absence of an existing institution that frames the conditions of spectatorship and of interpretation, the object itself ‘institutes’ a space of reflection. Certeau puts forward two conceptions of seeing, one of which departs from a visible figure in order to grasp something invisible that moves within. This notion of vision tackles a dimension of visibility that is ‘invisible’ in the sense of something that the organ of the eye cannot immediately grasp. Certeau stresses that, based on the work of Nicholas of Cusa, this ‘vision’ is not in contradiction with knowledge and erudition. It functions as an instrument of intellectual speculation, something Certeau describes as ‘theoretical excess’, ‘conceptual “flashes” outrun, overflow, and disrupt the formal course of the reasoning’.¹³⁰ Certeau pays particular interest to the preface of Nicholas of Cusa’s treaty *De icona. De visione Dei (The Painting: The Vision of God)* (1453). In this introductory text, Cusa proposes an exercise based on looking at a painting of portraiture; taking on the role of a

¹²⁹ In his latest work titled *24/7: late capitalism and the ends of sleep* (2013), Crary envisions the significance of completely suspending our attention through sleep as one of the few remaining spaces of resistance to unrestrained demands of attention and sensory stimulation.

¹³⁰ Michel de Certeau, ‘The Gaze Nicholas of Cusa’, *Diacritics*, Vol. 17, No. 3. (Autumn, 1987): 10. Last accessed 3 January 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/464833>. DOI: 10.2307/464833

spectator and putting into practice one's capacity of looking at an image. Through this exercise, Cusa attempts to prove that wherever the observer positions himself in relation to the painting, the gaze of the character in the image looks in the observer's direction and encounters the spectator's gaze. The exercise also works when several onlookers look at the painting simultaneously and even if they move altogether and change positions while looking. The painting is a religious image and although the exercise proposed by Cusa evokes a scientific experiment — giving birth to a modern form of observation — it is also a spiritual exercise carried out in order to strengthen a belief. Here, belief and scientific experiment both conjure up, according to Certeau, a 'fantastic of the gaze'.¹³¹ The image becomes the material support that makes a discourse flow, and whose role is to induce belief: Certeau shows that in Cusa's text, discourse is organized by the gaze that pre-empts it. Certeau writes:

A desire marks the threshold of an access to another mode of operations, carried out by several people and no longer by just one; it makes possible a qualitative change of space, by allowing the introduction of a social field within the visual field.¹³²

The act of looking is thus seen as a communal act; which might allow us to make a parallel with the collective space of theatre, or that of the museum. Certeau stresses that this desire to experiment substitutes itself to a sole desire to know and thus contribute to transforming the status of knowledge.¹³³ Beyond the question of vertical knowledge, the desire for experience suggests a form of adhesion and of belief that is combined to a form of 'active hospitality' inherent to the collective nature of such belief. For Certeau, 'Belief is thus the moment, to be repeated indefinitely, by which the insanity of the gaze is transformed into discourse and into history'.¹³⁴ Through his singling out of Cusa's preface, Certeau confronts two contradictory epistemologies: on the one hand, he describes the methodology of Cusa's experiment as rational and thus evokes a scientific experiment; on the other hand, he also describes the experiment as a spiritual exercise, based on a conception of vision that attempts to give visibility to something invisible and produces a collective desire to believe. Certeau takes the position of the one who tells the story although he has not experienced the phenomenon itself and thus fulfils the role of the believer, who he describes as the spectator who 'sees without seeing', and 'speaks without speaking' as 'he speaks in the place of the other'. Certeau writes that in Cusa's story, the spectator rather feels himself being watched. Thus, Certeau proposes

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12

¹³² *Ibid.*, 20

¹³³ This desire to experiment is also mentioned by Christophe Kihm in regards to practice of spectators in contemporary artistic practice. Experimenting substitutes itself to interpreting in a more traditional sense.

¹³⁴ Certeau, 'The Gaze Nicholas of Cusa', 21

that a form of passivity is inherent to spectatorship. This form of passivity Certeau describes as a seeing without seeing, or the idea of being watched by the object we look at, is an affirming and positive form of spectatorship. Certeau defines this mode of spectatorship, through which one does not intend to distinguish between inner and outer vision, as an undoing of traditional hierarchies, and more specifically the hierarchies between inner and outer vision, between affective and rational knowledge, and knowledge and belief. In an article, titled 'The Madness of Vision', which gives an account of his reading of philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *The Visible and the Invisible*, Certeau writes:

This philosophy thus does not dominate its object. It is interior to it. It is captivated by the object of which it speaks. As the vision of the painter, it is seen by what it considers. Its style is not the one of bright ironic and authoritarian games of autonomy; it is the erotic play of a passion whose object comes but is not possessed.¹³⁵

Through my reading of Certeau's writing, I am presented with a concept of spectatorship that unfolds as an integral part in the production of knowledge and discourse, and yet finds its foundation in belief and in a form of vision that takes distance from the act of looking itself, opening up a space of narration, which I will later engage with as fabulation. He goes on to write:

But in the framing of knowledge, belief introduces the excess of the advent of things; it creates a smudge in the real, an overflow of being. In sum a non-seeing (a non-knowing) is the movement that carries vision.¹³⁶

I would like to argue that Certeau's conceptualization of spectatorship through his writing on Nicholas of Cusa and Merleau-Ponty distinguishes itself from habitual accounts of spectatorship in modern and contemporary art. I am interested in the idea that subjective vision is not only assigned to artistic practice but is also very clearly assigned here to the practice of the spectator. This is really crucial because it upsets a traditional distribution of roles within which the artist is thought as the one materializing his or her subjective vision, while the spectator — and the curator — fulfils the role of the appreciator and the interpreter of the artwork. In Certeau's story, the practice of spectatorship is imbued with another capacity through the ability to see without seeing, and speak without speaking, which is to believe, and to narrate. For Certeau, this capacity to believe is not set in opposition to knowing. Believing embodies 'theoretical excess', a means of intellectual speculation that

¹³⁵ Michel de Certeau 'La folie de la vision', *Esprit* (juin 1982): 92 (Translation is mine).

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 97.

makes the production of discourse and of knowledge possible.

Furthermore, Certeau's spectator does not attempt to possess the object of his or her gaze. I would argue that we may understand 'possess' in two ways: on the one hand, possessing might refer to the desire to decipher, to possess through knowledge and reason, to control the object through the objective gaze; on the other hand, 'possess' could refer to a more economic understanding of possession through which a spectator becomes a collector and privatises his or her relationship to the work of art by removing it from public space. In his contribution to *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Jean-Paul Martinon states:

As such, and perhaps unbeknownst to itself, the curatorial cherishes ignorance, not as an aspiration towards stupidity, but in a Batailleian sense, as a letting go of what calls (sometimes desperately) for possession.¹³⁷

The notions of possession, ignorance, belief, and vision bring us back to focus on the fundamental role of spectatorship and the act of passivity in curatorial practice, which in recognizing these effects turns the figure of the curator on her head and asks us to seriously rethink how we may conceive of the curator as a subject: what the implications may be when we consider the curator as a subject, and how we define the curator-as-subject in the context of a curatorial practice that stages encounters between multiple subjects and objects.

Much of the discourse that I have referred to in this chapter has focused on determining how the curator acts in the world, what he or she produces, what functions they fulfil, and what roles the curator plays. I was struck by the fact that these discussions systematically define curatorial practice from the same perspective, which is the point of view of action, work, and production as inscribed in other public contexts. And yet, in the gap produced by the shift from the figure of the curator towards the notion of curatorial practice, we are confronted with a more complex assemblage of subjects and objects; we face a greater uncertainty and instability in regard to the activity, agency, and expertise of the curator, which is to be understood in opposition to his or her supposed impossible passivity. I will claim that considering curatorial practice through the lens of an expanded form of passivity rethinks the curatorial occupation with the institution, unsettles multiple yet stable meanings associated with curating, and challenges the proliferation of activities as much as their rigid separation between mainstream and peripheral, blockbuster and experimental.

¹³⁷ Jean-Paul Martinon, 'Theses in the Philosophy of Curating', in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Chapter 2, 'the ignorant body', page 14, Kindle edition for mac.

CHAPTER II — A TRANSFORMATIVE AND EMBODIED PASSIVITY

In this doctoral project, curatorial practice is investigated from the double perspective of practice and writing. As I suggested in the preceding chapter, the proliferation of terms used as descriptors of curatorial practice, i.e., curator, curating, curatorial practice, and the curatorial, reveal the difficulties inherent to the attempt at defining this object. Moreover, this vocabulary declares the multiple and contradictory approaches that are currently in discussion (and practice) in both professional and academic fields. As a recent, yet existing, object of study, curatorial practice carries ideological constructions, discourses, habits, standards and models, as well as a set of existing relations that determine how it functions within the field of art and in society at large. In a recent allocution, curator and writer Matthew Poole stated that

Art produces radical self-reflexive new subjectivities and so does business and industry (if indeed we can tell them apart) and maybe they are radical and maybe they aren't — it doesn't matter. We must accept this and ask what other types or characters of subjectivity can be produced by and as art that resist or otherwise transform this current total de-differentiation.¹³⁸

I share with Poole a similar observation and diagnosis in regard to the adjustment of art production and curatorial practice to the functioning of capitalist economy. We can begin by stressing that art institutions, with curatorial and artistic practices as tools and content-providers, have played their part in the humanist logic of neo-liberal governmentality, making art and culture an important leverage in the modalities of a governance that has the objective of producing a sociality based on a logic of security rather than discipline. In the context of this neo-liberal condition, artistic and curatorial practices can be said to provide relevant modes of labouring practices entrenched in modes of production of subjectivity:

As paradigms of entrepreneurial selfhood, “creatives”, as they are now labelled, are the apple of the policymaker's eye, and are recipients of the kind of lip service usually bestowed by national managers on high-tech engineers as generators of value.¹³⁹

We might continue by emphasizing that art production has become the site of intense financial speculation, whose effect cannot be limited to the specific sphere of the art market but also weighs in on the broader context of institutional practices and the increasing dependence on rich galleries and collectors to finance some of its exhibitions, collection

¹³⁸ Matthew Poole, 'introduction', *Anti-Humanist Curating* (Seminar 2), Whitechapel Gallery, London, Thursday 25 November 2010 (Source : <http://www.thepoliticalcurrencyofart.org.uk/anti-humanist-curating-archive>).

¹³⁹ Andrew Ross, *No-collar: The Humane Workplace and Its Hidden Costs* (New York: Basic Books, 2003): 32.

displays, and acquisitions. It also seems to me central to acknowledge and further explore the issue of the affective dimension of curatorial labour — within the larger context of other activities including artistic work itself — in order to address what has been designated as an intensifying ‘precariousness’¹⁴⁰ of curatorial practice:

Studies have highlighted a number of relatively stable features of this kind of work: a preponderance of temporary, intermittent and precarious jobs; long hours and bulimic patterns of working; the collapse or erasure of the boundaries between work and play; poor pay; high levels of mobility; passionate attachment to the work and to the identity of creative labourer (e.g. web designer, artist, fashion designer); an attitudinal mind-set that is a blend of bohemianism and entrepreneurialism; informal work environments and distinctive forms of sociality; and profound experiences of insecurity and anxiety about finding work, earning enough money and “keeping up” in rapidly changing fields.¹⁴¹

Facing this complex situation, I claim that the responses that conventional approaches to curatorial practice provide are insufficient. As a way to challenge the disciplining discourses and ideological constructions that have come to define curatorial practice, I will propose a different set of questions that have emerged through my different encounters with practices in the field of curating. Through my experience as a curator, I have noticed that curators were, more or less explicitly, asked to demonstrate their supplementary value, something that makes them more than organisers and administrators, and thus legitimate; transforming the abnegation and erasure of the personality, which Heinich and Pollack described as characteristic of the traditional curator, into the affirmation of a creative production entitled to be considered as authorial. It is however crucial to emphasize that authorship can reveal paradoxical and contradictory claims and positions.

In the context of my project, I will attempt to align the claim of authorship in curatorial practice with the late developments of capitalism. Curators have been asked to capitalize on their competencies and produce knowledge specific to their practice and function, in order to

¹⁴⁰ ‘Precariousness (in relation to work) refers to all forms of insecure, contingent, flexible work – from illegalized, casualized and temporary employment, to homeworking, piecework and freelancing.’ Rosalind Gill and Andy Pratt, ‘Precarity and cultural work in the social factory ? Immaterial labour, precariousness and cultural work’, *oncurating.org* Issue 16 ‘Precarious labour in the field of art’. Last accessed 31 March 2015. URL: http://www.on-curating.org/files/oc/dateverwaltung/old%20Issues/ONCURATING_Issue16.pdf

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 33

create supplementary value inherent to their signature — a combination of name and curatorial style. As a result, curatorial practices appear to grow closer to artistic ones. About this transformation of curatorial practice in the second half of the twentieth century, Francesco Manacorda writes:

The increasing proximity of curatorial and artistic strategies [which] alarmingly blurs the roles and positions, generating a divided exhibition as the space where conflicting signifiers co-exist and sometimes engage in an undeclared struggle.¹⁴²

The urgency of a critical questioning regarding the present workings of curatorial practice is anchored in different dimensions that have come to define curatorial subjectivities: liberal humanism, entrepreneurship, complicity with financial speculation, precariousness, competitiveness, and individualism. In this context, I have put forward the hypothesis that most available approaches to curatorial practice have abandoned a series of fundamental questions and problems, which in fact could be exceptionally valuable for reinventing its relationships with artistic practice and institutions, and proposing transformative modes of production of subjectivity. In my project, I have been concerned with the lack of differentiation between the function of artistic practice and of curatorial practice: numerous statements declare that an increasing number of curatorial practices share similar concerns with artistic practice in their affirmation of autonomy and authorship; yet they insufficiently address the complexity proper to such concepts of autonomy and authorship, and avoid questioning the impact of such an affirmation in regards to the consequent transformations of the relationships between artistic and curatorial practices.¹⁴³

Curatorial practice is one of few practices that has an exemplary role to play in promoting forms of enunciation that are fundamentally heterological, in the sense that they assert a relationship of dependence and of debt in regards to an other — subject, object, or else — rather than capitalistic relationships of autonomy and possession as property.¹⁴⁴ Dependence and debt are inseparable from notions of passivity and dispossession: therefore I claim that a

¹⁴² Francesco Manacorda, 'The Four Discourses of Curating', *Manifesta Journal* MJ #5 artist and curator (Spring / Summer 2005).

¹⁴³ I am referring to texts by Nathalie Heinich ('From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur', In *Thinking Of Exhibitions*), Jens Hoffmann ('A Certain Tendency of Curating', In *Curating Subjects*), Anton Vidokle ('Art Without Artists?', In *Cultures of the Curatorial*), Dorothea von Hantelman ('Affluence and Choice', In *Cultures of the Curatorial*), and Dorothy Richter ('Artists and Curators as Authors, Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers', In *Cultures of the Curatorial*). These authors nevertheless propose different positions regarding the emergence and affirmation of authority and authorship in curating, and yet they converge in comparing the transforming figure of the curator with the figure of the artist.

¹⁴⁴ The choice of the term 'enunciation' refers explicitly to Michel de Certeau, whose use of the term will be addressed in this chapter; but 'enunciation' also plays a central role in Francesco Manacorda's essay titled 'The Four Discourses of Curating', which has been important at the early stages of my research.

reinvention of passivity — as a theoretical and pragmatic posture — can help disrupt the ideological constructions of curatorial practice and its complicity with both market economy and neo-liberal politics.

Section II.1 — A revised and augmented concept of passivity

Passivity is usually defined through a multiplicity of varying statements that constitute a sum of mostly negative propositions: passivity is rarely defined positively. Passivity thus appears as the negative form of its other, opposite, and positive form, which is activity. Therefore passivity comes to signify an absence of action, reaction, or participation, as well as being dominated by and under the influence of another or others. Passivity is also associated with synonyms such as ‘inertia’ and ‘apathy’, hinting at forms of pathology associated with depression. Passivity has been metaphorically used to produce a distinction between objects and subjects, considering objects as fundamentally passive whereas subjects are supposed to be active — a passive subject constitutes a form of dysfunction and pathology. I claim that this opposition between passivity and activity poses a fundamental problem, particularly because, through setting up this opposition, activity and passivity simultaneously polarize normalized conceptions of rational and irrational behaviours, function and dysfunction, normality and pathology. Activity has moreover been overinvested in the context of neo-liberalism through its association with individualism, autonomy, competition, and entrepreneurship. In this context forms of passivity have been considered as forms of refusal, conservatism — as a resistance to change — lack of personality and creativity, and, worse, laziness.

How could we think of passivity differently? How could we mobilize passivity, and to what purpose in terms of curating? What would these non-conforming definitions of passivity produce? In the following sections of this chapter, I will attempt to embark on a journey throughout different forms of thought and practices that mobilize passivity and value it as positive and affirming. Nevertheless, these following approaches to passivity are complex and should be carefully considered in the context of their enunciation. They do not always overlap nor add up; they might also contradict each other, calling on the reader and writer to keep track of these rhizomatic forms of expression within which an expanded concept of passivity is played against both passivity (in its customary sense) and activity: The form of passivity that I will discuss in relation to the performances of Matt Mullican will not overlap with the form of passivity that I have experienced in the context of my curatorial practice or in my research project on Mullican and his hypnosis performances; on the contrary, Mullican’s passivity might fail at producing the dissident position that I associate with another form of curatorial passivity. This chapter will attempt to negotiate these turns and fully take on these paradoxes and contradictions.

Section II.1.1 — The collapse of the opposition between passivity and activity in the context of the hypnotic relation

I first encountered Matt Mullican's work in 2006 while working on the production of his performance under hypnosis at Tate Modern, which took place in January 2007. [Fig 10 – 11] I knew nothing about the hypnotic phenomenon, yet I recall being forcefully affected by my experience of watching Mullican's performance. I was immediately drawn to the body of work that I was confronted with. Mullican's work produces the context through which he unfolds an experimental exploration of consciousness as the exemplary emplacement where an idiosyncratic vision of the world is produced. When I met Matt Mullican, I also came across Vicente de Moura,¹⁴⁵ who is a psychotherapist trained in Jungian psychoanalysis practicing hypnosis; he has worked with Mullican several times in the context of his performances.

Mullican began using hypnosis in 1978. [Fig 12 – 13] His performances under hypnosis take place in front of an audience: spectators are seated, yet not in a completely frontal way like in a classical theatrical space, but rather in a semicircle around a space dedicated to the artist's movements. At Tate Modern, Mullican requested to have at his disposal a wall on which we hung sheets of white paper covering a large surface of the wall for him to draw on during the performance. He used black paint. Mullican also asked for a list of specific objects to be available on stage: a bed, a table with breakfast (coffee, orange juice, some fruits), a newspaper, a stepladder for him to reach the top of the wall when drawing, and white masking tape. The performances often began in the same manner. Mullican would come into the space after the audience sat down, his walk would be different from usual, strange and hesitant. At the start of a performance, he would take the masking tape and would draw a line between him and the audience in order to mark out his performance area. Mullican later explained that he also relied on this gesture of marking out the space as an initial act, something that he had to do, a way to start within this empty situation; indeed, as emphasized in our subsequent conversations, he had nothing planned, no lines to remember and no scenario or script of any kind to rely on. The line drawn by Mullican between him and the audience is precarious: it presents and represents the distance that separates the artist and the spectators. Multiple distances are literally or metaphorically enacted within the framework of Mullican's performance under hypnosis. The gap between an ordinary state of consciousness

¹⁴⁵ Vicente L. de Moura is a psychologist, Jungian analyst, and practitioner of hypnosis. His practice is based in Zürich. He met Matt in 2003 and has worked with him on his performances in Zürich (2003), Geneva (2004), Cologne (2005), Lisbon (2006), London (2007) and Como (2013).

and the state of consciousness under hypnosis that seems, albeit stereotypically, acted out by the artist: Mullican walks his eyes closed, talks, sings, sometimes screams or swear, writes and paints on paper. His attitudes and postures have often been compared to people who suffer from a mental illness or a disability such as autism — despite the differences from one performance to another, the gestures performed by Mullican share this quality. There is no narrative and the performance often ends when Mullican can no longer sustain the intensity of the confrontation with the audience and so walks out. At Tate Modern, it took Mullican many long minutes of walking back and forth along the back wall before he could get out of a certain form of inertia and silence. This particular performance emphasized the feeling of anxiety that relates to an audience's critical judgement, and thus stressed a sense of precariousness in regards to the performance itself. At some point Mullican with his face to the floor kept screaming that he was a 'fake, not even a funny fake' but 'a sad fake'. He later said that he felt he had to say out loud what everyone was thinking, wondering if this hypnotic trance was real, if Mullican was faking it.¹⁴⁶ The distance between authenticity and imitation was therefore central. I was absorbed by the aesthetic dimensions of the work of Mullican produced in the conditions determined by the hypnotic trance: the performative qualities (gestures, voice, dramaturgy) of the work as well as the formal qualities of the drawing realized during the performance. Beyond the immediate captivation, various questions emerged in regards to my experience as a spectator: I started to question the relationship between the artist and the hypnotist in terms of influence, agency, and control. The relationship that brings together Mullican and the hypnotist is of a specific nature; it simultaneously questions our collective views on what an artist is in our contemporary context, as well as what the hypnotic phenomenon is, leading one to distrust the authenticity of the hypnotic trance and wonder if Mullican was really under hypnosis, and even if he was, can we say that he is the author of an artwork under these conditions?¹⁴⁷ Thus it puts the authorial control of Mullican over his own work into question. The work attempts to reflect on the intricate relationship between activity and passivity within the context of the artist's performances under hypnosis. This is how the notion of passivity emerged in my project. It came from straightforward questions related to the hypnotic trance: Was Mullican conscious?

¹⁴⁶ Interview of Matt Mullican at the occasion of his performance at Tate Modern: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dS4Ly6M1td4>

¹⁴⁷ In her article titled 'Reclaiming animism', Isabelle Stengers pertinently brings forward the common use of the term "really" in the contemporary context when one deals with issues such as "magic" and "belief". She writes: 'Again it will be a question of thinking by the milieu, but this time a milieu that is dangerous and insalubrious, one that entices us to feel that we bear the high responsibility to determine what is entitled to 'really' exist and what is not.' Isabelle Stengers, 'Reclaiming Animism', *e-flux journal* #36 (July 2012).

Was he in control of his movements, of his thoughts, and of his speech? Was he acting under someone else's suggestions, someone else's instructions?

Discussing the performance at Tate Modern, Mullican said to an interviewer that when he started the performance he found himself in a situation of waiting, awaiting that something happens, that something comes up.¹⁴⁸ This assertion is ambiguous: what does Mullican wait for? It seems that a gap opens up between two states of 'I', producing a particular geography within which a dilatation of Mullican's subjectivity takes place, letting another instantiation of the 'I' emerge, an 'I' that also becomes the 'he' or 'it' of 'That Person'.¹⁴⁹ Yet the time and space of waiting might also point to the person of the hypnotist, whose connection with Mullican remains undefined. In this situation, hypnosis was upsetting the limit between activity and passivity within the work of Mullican; although the form of passivity that emerged implicated the relationship between two people (extending perhaps to other forms of being as well).¹⁵⁰

By recounting key elements of my research on Mullican's performances under hypnosis, I will first provide some information about the hypnotic phenomenon (to share the narrative that allowed me to start shaping a renewed definition of passivity). The complexity of the phenomenon of hypnosis has been at the centre of Mullican's dealings with hypnosis since his first experiments in 1978. It is important to stress that hypnosis is an ambivalent practice, used within the context of medicine and therapy as well as at the music hall and theatre as an entertaining spectacle. We might say that today most people continue to approach hypnosis with the expectation of finding a magical dimension, and paradoxically, also fear that they will be manipulated or tricked. This ambivalence is essential when we consider the public reception of Mullican's performances under hypnosis. Mullican himself began using hypnosis with the desire to stage a 'super theatre', considering the hypnotic phenomenon as a means to blur the distinction between reality and fiction through the use of the powerful instrument of suggestion. Mullican has dealt with hypnotists with ambivalence; his relations have often resulted in a confrontation with the power they exerted on him and of their own desire to take control of the stage. Mullican stopped making performances under hypnosis between 1982 and 1992. When he came back to performance, his relationship to hypnosis had radically

¹⁴⁸ Interview of Matt Mullican at the occasion of his performance at Tate Modern: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dS4Ly6M1td4>

¹⁴⁹ I employ here a term borrowed from Michel de Certeau in his article on Jean-Joseph Surin's 'science experimental', attempting to describe Surin's uses of 'I' and 'he' to designate himself and more specifically his experience of madness in the context of writing. I will expand on this later in this chapter.

¹⁵⁰ Yet hypnosis can also be used in collective sessions.

changed, reflecting the distinct approaches of hypnosis at work among the practitioners of hypnosis themselves.¹⁵¹

The modern ethics of hypnosis assert the autonomy of the hypnotized subject in relation to the hypnotist; in a therapeutic context, the patient under hypnosis continues to have agency over his or her actions. Mullican's relationship to hypnosis is singular as it declares to have no therapeutic ambition. The decision not to let the audience see the deployment of the relationship between him and the hypnotherapist relates to this fundamental distinction. It should remain clear that what the audience sees is a work of art, and not a therapy session. By refusing to reveal the details of this relationship, Mullican leaves the space of the spectators' imagination wide open, allowing them to fantasize about this relationship and also doubt the sincerity of the artist. The ethics of modern hypnosis provide a context within which it is possible to claim that even if the practice of hypnosis forces us to question the distribution of authorship in Mullican's work, it nevertheless helps us to dismiss an oversimplified reading of his actions as a complete relinquishing of authorial control over the production of the work. Mullican describes hypnosis as a floating situation: in this transient state, he affirms that he has become other to himself, moving toward the inside of his own psyche, which has been repeatedly identified by the artist as *That Person*. This impulse to position himself at a distance from the subjective 'I' through hypnosis shows his strong-minded will to explore the complex functioning of the human mind, his obsession with the construction of characters and the tenuous limits between objective and subjective universes — under their multiple names of belief, fiction, dream, future, unconscious or imaginary.

The passivity inherent to Mullican's work is tied to the artist's desire for a form of experimentation — an exploration of his psyche — that necessitates a temporary form of dispossession and an acceptance that such an experimental endeavour is indebted to forms of knowledge (considering hypnosis as a form of knowledge, or, on the contrary a form of non-knowledge as we will later discuss) and practices that he did not master. Mullican is therefore dependent on other people in order to construct a methodology for accessing dimensions of

¹⁵¹ Modern hypnosis emerged in the early 1950's through the work of American psychotherapist Milton Erickson. 'The Ericksonian approach departs from traditional hypnosis in a variety of ways. While the process of hypnosis has customarily been conceptualized as a matter of the therapist issuing standardized instructions to a passive patient, Ericksonian hypnosis stresses the importance of the interactive therapeutic relationship and purposeful engagement of the inner resources and experiential life of the subject.' (Foundation Milton Erickson, <http://erickson-foundation.org/biography/>) Although Ericksonian hypnosis became rapidly quite popular in the context of psychotherapy, it gradually reached European countries - for example, the first institute dedicated to Ericksonian hypnosis opened in France in 1984 – and hypnosis continued to be used through a multiplicity of approaches. It appears that Mullican encountered Ericksonian following different experiences and this modern approach of hypnosis only entered his practice in the 1990s, particularly through his work with therapists such as Vicente de Moura.

his consciousness that he did not feel were immediately accessible in the context of his artistic practice. In Mullican's artistic practice, the passivity that he mobilizes through his work under hypnosis is based on the pragmatic conditions of a research experiment. In regards to the artistic paradigm that Mullican's work can be associated with, this form of passivity works alongside other artistic approaches that refuse to demystify the artistic act; it refutes the necessity to reveal the entirety of the process, or at least it calls upon the irrational dimension of any artistic act considered as resisting signification, even to the artist himself. I would argue that in Mullican's artistic process hypnosis is a means to an end. The form of passivity that is at work in Mullican's practice therefore does not overlap with the passivity that I encountered in my own investigation of hypnotic phenomena. I will thus attempt in the section that follows to closely examine a form of passivity that is proper to the hypnotic relation in the modern practice of hypnosis.

Léon Chertok defines hypnosis as

a fourth state of the human organism, currently not definable (in opposition to the three other states: wakefulness, sleep, dream): a sort of natural potentiality, an innate apparatus taking its roots as far as the animal hypnosis, characterised by features that apparently send us back to the pre-verbal relationships of the attachment of the child and that occur in situations in which the individual is disturbed in his relations to his or her environment.¹⁵²

Although it is acknowledged that what is defined as hypnotic trance can be found in everyday life as a temporary state of modified attention or consciousness of the subject without the intervention of another person, the relationship between the hypnotherapist and his or her patient is at the heart of the question of hypnotizability. Chertok states that 'hypnotizability depends on "the ease with which an individual can interiorize an external stimulus and make it part of himself"'.¹⁵³ He adds:

Hypnosis is a relation in which two personalities meet and play one in relation to the other a complementary role. Thus hypnotizability depends on multiple relations, inter and intrapersonal, that are put in motion.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² This definition is given by François Roustang in *Qu'est ce que l'hypnose ?* (Paris: les éditions de Minuit, 1994), 11 (Translation is mine).

¹⁵³ Léon Chertok, *L'Hypnose* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1965), 81. Chertok quotes Pierre Janet in *L'Automatisme psychologique* (1889). (Translation is mine).

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 91.

Hypnosis deals with embodied subjects, as bodies immersed in a set of physical relations in the world as a whole, real, and imagined. François Roustang writes:

Hypnosis ... does not study the human subject for him or herself, in what we have called their psyche, because hypnosis only considers the person in and through their environment, only in and through their relation to the world; hypnosis is thus no more subjective than objective, no more individual than collective.¹⁵⁵

Roustang puts forward the term of *disposition*¹⁵⁶ as an essential moment of the hypnotic relation. He defines it as a 'way of being'; it is a physical state that allows a thing or a person to receive a new quality, a new form. The patient enters a state through which he or she achieves a state of concentration, of relaxation that will allow their mind to become available for a different sort of experience. Roustang insists on the fact that the states of awareness that we experience — the limited awareness of daily life and the generalized awareness of hypnosis — both imply consciousness and will. However, he claims that while the awareness experienced in daily life has more to do with mental reasoning, the generalized awareness of hypnosis has to do with the body. He continues in stating that to reach the possibility of effective action, consciousness and will have to be embodied. The role of the hypnotherapist is to bring the patient to this state of disposition, without which no changes or actions are possible. Through this journey, Léon Chertok and Isabelle Stengers insist on the importance of empathy as a physical engagement of the therapist in the relationship with his or her patient. The therapist's deployment of techniques of communication is also embodied, engaged in 'a history in which what is at stake is not the production of truth, but the production of new affective experiences for his patient'.¹⁵⁷ The therapist in hypnosis is not in a position to judge, interpret, or decipher, and will acknowledge that their knowledge of the patient is inextricably linked to the affects that he or she experiences with the patient. To be in disposition (in French, *être dans la disposition*) is to be able to reassess ideas, values, and

¹⁵⁵ Roustang, *Qu'est ce que l'hypnose ?*, 10.

¹⁵⁶ Despite some hesitations regarding the translation of the French term 'disposition', I finally decided to keep the same word in English language. My doubts regarding the particular translation of this term, whose importance in the context of Roustang's approach of hypnosis I have emphasized, invested this term with a particular significance. Perhaps this led me to pay a particular interest in Jean-Luc Nancy's own use of the term in *Corpus* and in the recurrence of the term 'disposition' in *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (London: Polity Press, 2013), which is a conversation between philosophers Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou. In the context of their exchange, 'disposition' qualifies a position of the subject in its capacity to expose him/herself to others, that is, to alterity and relationality: a form of fissuring and decentering of the subject. Throughout their conversation 'disposition' is intricately bound to dispossession and exposure. Athanasiou writes: 'The condition of dispossession — as exposure and disposition to others, experience of loss and grief, or susceptibility to norms and violences that remain indifferent to us — is the source of our responsiveness and responsibility to others.' (Chapter 10, page 1, Kindle edition for mac)

¹⁵⁷ Léon Chertok and Isabelle Stengers, *Hypnose, blessure narcissique* (Paris: Institut Synthelabo, 1999), 41 (Translation is mine).

activities in order to transform and reinvent one's life, relationships to others, and obligations. Roustang also suggests that one could then 'be disposed in one's place', and thus be able to hold one's place and inhabit one's body, which would therefore allow someone to act and transform all the relations of power involved. In his account on hypnosis, Roustang addresses a contrast between the individualism central to psychoanalysis and a change of perspective central to the phenomenon of hypnosis. Yet he notes that this 'individualist mythology' has had an impact on our relationship to hypnosis, isolating the hypnotic experience and focusing it on the individual. This limitation of hypnosis to the individual is an obstacle for the multiplicity of links that hypnosis reveals.¹⁵⁸

In Mullican's work, the hypnotherapist becomes the complementary relation that produces an artistic form; Vicente de Moura asserts that he is neither subject nor object of Mullican's experience,¹⁵⁹ but helps him to channel his inner psychic figures in the context of his artistic production. In this context, hypnosis forces us to recognize the way we habitually oppose activity and passivity, control and submission, but also how we restrict ourselves in our use of language. Hypnosis does not allow for these polarities to function, rather it allows us to open a wider range of terms and broaden our definition of each term. Mullican is neither passive nor active because he is both at the same time during the process. Activity and passivity can no longer help define the positions of Mullican or the hypnotist because activity and passivity simultaneously characterize the relationship that connects them as individuals.

The work I undertook on Mullican's performances and on multiple approaches of hypnosis¹⁶⁰ forced me to question traditional concepts of control, agency, and authorship, and more specifically to rethink their unquestioned correlation with notions of autonomy, independence, and freedom in the context of art. Hypnosis introduced me to a body of thought regarding belief, trust, and empathy, and how they make other forms and qualities of relation possible. The embodied approach of hypnosis that simultaneously addresses physical bodies and mental reasoning has provided me with a relevant model to think through curatorial practice's relation to embodiment. The contribution of hypnosis is also crucial in the

¹⁵⁸ Roustang, *Qu'est ce que l'hypnose ?*, 11 – 12.

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Vicente de Moura, Como, July 2013.

¹⁶⁰ In the framework of my residency at I did at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht, followed by another residency in the framework of Performance in residence with If I Can't Dance I Don't Want to Be Part of Your Revolution in Amsterdam, I explored the work under hypnosis carried out by Mullican since 1978. The principal outcome of the research was a book published in 2014 titled *Matt Mullican, Pure Projection Landscapes*, designed by Will Holder, for which I wrote an essay and gathered a portfolio of mostly unpublished drawings and notes by the artist.

deconstruction of the philosophical subject, and unveils the obsession with the individual in our present political condition.

In the work of philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, hypnosis, and more specifically the concept of passivity that emerges through hypnosis, fundamentally informed his critical approach of the subject in Western thought. Nancy writes:

Passivity is not individual: one can be active alone, but we can only be passive as two or more persons. Passivity is, of the individual, what shakes and drifts away from her, moving her away from herself, spacing her from a beat.¹⁶¹

In the essays brought together under the title *Hypnoses* by Nancy, Éric Michaud, and Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen, the authors propose taking distance from hypnosis in its therapeutic and technical dimension to rather think of it as a possible ‘limit of consciousness, of individuality, of power, of pathology, etc.’.¹⁶² Passivity is a central concept in their investigation of hypnotic states; noting that by passivity they do not imply docility or political inaction in the social realm, or an obscure idea of submission. The concept of passivity that emerges from Nancy, Michaud, and Borch-Jacobsen’s multiple perspectives on hypnosis fundamentally disrupts a series of terms and related ideas that have been central to Western philosophy and to psychoanalysis. They write:

We only question what, of passivity, or of an even more archaic passion that the one at work in the couple passive/active, surfaces as much in the prosecution of psychoanalysis as in philosophical discourse, in the ordeal of thought, in the experience of singularity and of community.¹⁶³

The traditional notions of identity and of the subject are therefore put to the test through the exploration of hypnosis, obliging us to rethink what we might have taken for granted.

During the hypnotic trance, Mullican makes the experience of himself as simultaneously subject and object; he says,

When I work with That Person, I am unearthing a part of me almost as if it were a found object. ... It looks as if I am being consumed by this found object.¹⁶⁴

Both Mullican and the hypnotist experience themselves as subject, object, as well as something else, which Moura describes as being a ‘channel’ of Mullican’s ‘inner psychic

¹⁶¹ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Identité et tremblement’, in *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 43 (Translation is mine).

¹⁶² Michael Borch-Jacobsen, Éric Michaud and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 10 (Translation is mine).

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 11

¹⁶⁴ Koen Brams and Dirk Pultau, ‘Kunst en hypnose. Gesprek met Matt Mullican’, *De Witte Raaf* n°143 (January-February 2010).

figures', and which Mullican designates as That Person. Notions of subject and object are therefore no longer sufficient to qualify the status of being in the context of hypnosis. Hypnosis invites finding new terms to expand our concept of the subject. 'In hypnosis, it is about multiplication and dissociation: of identity, of activity, of possession, or else of desire, of will, of presence...' ¹⁶⁵ Art historian Pascal Rousseau, ¹⁶⁶ who has been looking into the multiple uses of hypnosis within artistic practices writes:

Under hypnosis the subject is able to recover the feeling of "existing in dependence on things", of being immersed in a force field that is no longer connected to a tutelary authority by an umbilical cord but rather grounded in a relationship with the world that is experience as self-invention. From this perspective, hypnosis is less a psychology of altered states of consciousness than a physics of bodies that allows for an authentic organizing power of the human being beyond any notion of magic, in which it is no longer the imagination that engenders hypnosis (as in Bernheim's hypothesis) but the "paradoxical wakefulness that allows the imagination to come alive and transform our relationships with beings and things". ¹⁶⁷

Nancy approaches hypnosis through the lens of the philosophical subject. Based on his reading of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's philosophical texts, Nancy exposes a traditional conception of the subject in Western philosophy in order to put it into question. ¹⁶⁸ He contrasts the identity of the subject with the differences materialized by the exterior; from the perspective of the subject, his or her identity contrasts with the alterity of the world that surrounds them. Yet Nancy stresses two forms of indifference: on the one hand, difference is indifferent as all subjects are equally different; on the other hand, for the subject, there is indifference between him and himself.

¹⁶⁵ Borch-Jacobsen, Michaud, and Nancy, *Hypnoses*, 10.

¹⁶⁶ Art historian Pascal Rousseau is Professor of Contemporary Art History at the Université de Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne. His researches in art history have focused on the origins of abstraction, concepts of synaesthesia and total work in the work of early twentieth century avant-gardes, issues of perception, spectacle and cognition in modern and contemporary artistic practices, including the use of hypnosis. He has curated the exhibitions *Fabrice Hyber. Pasteur' Spirit* at the Institut Pasteur, Paris (2010), *Sous influence. Résurgences de l'hypnose dans l'art contemporain* at Musée cantonal des Beaux-Arts de Lausanne (2006), and *Aux origines de l'abstraction. 1800–1914* at the Musée d'Orsay, Paris (2003). He currently leads a research programme titled 'Mind Control', exploring different approaches and techniques through which dialogues between art, science and cognitive processes emerge.

¹⁶⁷ Pascal Rousseau, 'Under the influence : hypnosis as a new medium', in *The Books of Books, 100 Notes – 100 Thoughts* (Kassel: Documenta 13, 2012), 517. Rousseau refers to François Roustang, *Qu'est ce que l'hypnose ?*, 14.

¹⁶⁸ Nancy makes repeated references to Hegel's *The Phenomenology of the Spirit* and *The Science of logic*.

A = A ... the real plural is excluded by principle. The path of self-consciousness might well depend on the desire and the acknowledgment of the other; yet it is determined beforehand as the circular process of the Self of that conscience.¹⁶⁹

However, Nancy writes:

One has to hear what A means. It is not a logical symbol, it is the initial of all initials: it is a name, a face, a voice. It is not properly an individual, since it is divided by its equality, but it is a singularity.¹⁷⁰

In his essay titled 'Identité et tremblement', Nancy therefore queries the equivalence between the individual, identity, and the subject. For him, A is a singularity, rather than an individual, and 'has in herself her own difference'.¹⁷¹ A is singular and A is plural. Nancy contests the concept of the subject considered first and foremost as 'imperturbably adult and awake',¹⁷² thus relegating every other state of the subject that does not comply with this definition as irrational or pathological. Nancy writes: 'Immortal, unborn, insomniac: this is the triple negation on which the life of the spirit takes off'.¹⁷³ However, Nancy brings forward an expanded concept of the subject, acknowledging a complexity and understanding of the plural that affirms the possibility of a differentiation within the subject himself. He thus asks:

Where does a different identity come from? From where can B come to A? Or again: what can make A tremble?¹⁷⁴

Nancy borrows from Hegel the term "soul" — distinct from the notion of "spirit" — in order to differentiate his concept of the subject and expand his perspective on the issues of difference and passivity. For Nancy, the soul is a different identity of the subject; it is the dimension of the subject that is sleeping, or sleepwalking, that can be affected to make an alteration and the transformation of the subject possible. Nancy writes:

It is just this sharing of a simple interiority: it is the awakening that takes place in sleep itself, or else it is sleep itself, this "return to the universal essence of subjectivity", as an individual. A sleeps being A himself, who is for himself while sleeping. It is called hypnosis.¹⁷⁵

¹⁶⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Identité et tremblement', *Hypnoses*, 17 (Translation is mine).

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

According to Nancy, hypnosis is thus the name for this fundamental dimension of subjectivity that is the capacity of affection, which should not be confused with simple passivity.¹⁷⁶ ‘Passivity could not be “simple”’: it cannot be determined as the power to receive or be affected.’¹⁷⁷ He writes:

Feeling does not make *me* a subject, it makes the soul a total affection, for herself, but only in the mode of “next to herself”. The same of the affective soul is this same asleep that confounds herself, because she never distinguished herself, never having been, with the totality of the other that affects her. Thus she knows neither the exterior as such, nor any limitation.¹⁷⁸

Through hypnosis Nancy thus envisions a state of being through which the limits that habitually determine the individual collapse, envisaging the relationship between the individual and the rest of the world through dependence, continuity, and belonging.

Nancy positions hypnosis in the field of the conscious subject; he describes hypnosis as a state of passivity that ‘offers this remarkable character of no longer being, or barely being, only at the limit, a state *of* the subject’.¹⁷⁹ For the hypnotized subject, Nancy argues, it is the very present of his or her presence that is suspended. This suspension of presence supposes the intervention of the other — the hypnotist — leading Nancy to describe the suspended presence of the hypnotized subject as ‘a pure presence that does not have for herself a present and neither present herself nor represent anything, only offered to the representation of the other’.¹⁸⁰

Nancy describes the knowledge made accessible through hypnosis as a knowledge of affection, ‘without the mediation of reason’, which points to the possibility of a different sort of knowledge directly related to affective experience and intuition.

Passivity is only this: that something happens, from another place, from the other. That something different happens. Passivity is not the property of being passive, and for example letting such and such mark be given or inscribed. Passivity does not do anything, not even on the mode of “doing” that would still be the mode of doing nothing.¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 25 (In italics in the original text).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 (In italics in the original text).

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

In Nancy's terms, what happens under hypnosis, during the sleep of the conscious subject, is the crossing of the subject by the self of the other. This passing of the other through the subject is metaphorically described by Nancy as a shiver, a vibration, or a vacillation as the advent of a distancing, a stepping aside one-self, 'as the rhythm of a sharing'.¹⁸²

Hypnosis allows Nancy to disrupt traditional philosophical approaches of the subject and of 'pathology', which, as Nancy remarks, 'directly depends on a mode of thought that considers freedom as pure auto-position and pure auto-production of a vigilant consciousness'.¹⁸³ Nancy allows thinking about passivity as a modality of being that cannot be tied to a unique subject but reveals a mode of presence that is offered to the representation of the other.

Simultaneously, it is the subject that can no longer be thought of as unique and centred, because passivity, defined as affection and as alteration, suspends the presence of the subject and exposes his or her difference.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 30.

Section II.1.2 — A curatorial passivity?

My reading of Nancy's essay on hypnosis ineluctably led me to passivity as a mode of being that does not let itself be appropriated by the individual subject and can only be conceived as a mode of relating: it characterizes a mode of being in the world, immersed in a complex set of relationships with bodies — subjects, objects, as well as other possible modes of existence — and exposes their difference. Passivity thus encourages us to take into consideration the gap and the movement that ceaselessly deviates us from individual entities in order to think of relations and of difference.

Nancy, Borch-Jacobsen, Michaud, Chertok, Roustang, and Stengers suggest that specific terms, such as passivity and hypnosis, and behind these terms, specific positions and convictions, appear as 'improper' in specific contexts, such as philosophy or science.

What is at stake, we will see, is passion, if not "the first of all passions", or passivity.

But we can't, without a doubt, ever say passivity. It is not a property, passivity is improper and accidental — properly and by essence.¹⁸⁴

On the one hand, as Nancy claims, passivity — in its simple, ordinary, and limited form — speaks of a lack of agency, of presence, of consciousness, thus it speaks of pathology, and of deficiency. On the other hand, hypnosis questions the limits of current models of scientificity. As Chertok and Stengers put it:

The singularity of hypnosis is thus that it is less a fact waiting for a theory than a fact questioning the position of a judgement on reality that a theory aims at instituting.¹⁸⁵

Hypnosis poses an essential problem:

the encounter with a brutal and unintelligible fact [hypnosis] is a dangerous experience that jeopardizes both the intellectual security and the professional status of the researcher.¹⁸⁶

Stengers further notes, 'for decades, he [Chertok] struggled for a non-knowledge, a perplexity to be acknowledged'.¹⁸⁷

Hypnosis and passivity seem improper and inadequate in many ways: despite contemporary philosophers' efforts to move beyond the unitary principle underlying the notions of being and of the subject in day to day practice passivity faces activity and is dismissed in favour of activity's neo-liberal acclaim. Curatorial practice has similarly avoided considering passivity

¹⁸⁴ Borch-Jacobsen, Michaud, and Nancy, *Hypnoses*, 11.

¹⁸⁵ Chertok and Stengers, *Hypnose, blessure narcissique*, 3.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

as a possible modality of being within the relations that connect curators, artists, institutions, artworks, and spectators. When it has — as I discussed in the preceding chapter in regards to spectatorship — it was through a simplistic notion of passivity, likened to inaction, submission, and subordination. Yet, different approaches and experiences of hypnosis coincide in claiming that there is no activity facing passivity.

Passivity belongs neither to the realm of technique nor to the one of power, but to the realm of being — and in being it essentially communicates with freedom, to which it makes one available and without which freedom cannot be thought.¹⁸⁸

Claiming passivity as a fundamental modality of curatorial practice begins to unsettle the individualist methodology at work within current curatorial practices. It does so by providing a theoretical tool that permits redefining the relationships between artistic practice, curatorial practice and institutions, not only taking into account the relationships between different forces and rapports of power between distinct human beings (the curator, the artist), but also expanding traditional categories and considering the relationships that may tie a plurality of bodies, subjects, objects, as well as, the possibility of other forms of being. As Nancy suggests, passivity as a modality of being relates to the modality of being-with, which he defines as ‘an ontology of bodies, of every body, whether they be inanimate, animate, sentient, speaking, thinking, having weight, and so on’.¹⁸⁹ In Nancy’s thought, the unitary subject is set aside in favour of a renewed approach of being: the position of the subject is a ‘dis-position’, which suggests being among other bodies that engage with different relations of proximity and distance¹⁹⁰. Rather than a typology of relations, Nancy produces a specific geography of the subject and of a possible community¹⁹¹. Envisioning curatorial passivity

¹⁸⁸ Borch-Jacobsen, Michaud, and Nancy, *Hypnoses*, 12.

¹⁸⁹ Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, (Stanford, CA : Stanford University Press, 2000), 84.

¹⁹⁰ The term of ‘dis-position’ occurs repeatedly in *Being Singular Plural* (Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, p 12 – 17). Nancy writes: ‘The very simplicity of “position” implies no more, although no less, than its being discrete, in the mathematical sense, or its distinction *from*, in the sense of *with*, other (at least possible) positions, or its distinction *among*, in the sense of *between*, other positions. In other words, every position is also dis-position, and, considering the appearing that takes the place of and takes place in the position, all appearance is co-appearance [*com-parution*]. This is why the meaning of Being is given as existence, being-in-oneself- outside-oneself, which *we* make explicit, we “humans,” but which we make explicit, as I have said, *for* the totality of beings.’ (Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 12).

¹⁹¹ Nancy’s approach of ‘Being’ as essentially ‘Being with’, leading to conceive the singularity of each human being as much as to consider their position in relation to each other. Nancy’s approach of ‘community’ is therefore fundamentally different from the concept of society; Nancy’s community is not the sum of individuals; community suggests an ontological dimension: it is our existence as singular beings in the sense that there is no distinction between being in itself and being with others. Such a concept of community was developed by Nancy in *The Inoperative Community* (*La Communauté désœuvrée*, 1986) and in *Being Singular Plural* (*Etre Singulier Pluriel*, 1996).

similarly attempts to replace a typology of professional roles, functions, of professional templates by a geography through which any form of typology collapses.

Chertok, Stengers, Roustang, and Nancy provide an approach to a form of relationship that substantially differs from the models of relationship between artist and curator available in existing discourses on curatorial practice. Through examining the hypnotic relationship, I therefore started to question the possibility of drawing a parallel with the relationship between artist and curator, departing from situations in the context of my own practice. The research I undertook regarding the performances under hypnosis of Matt Mullican informed and influenced the development of my doctoral project. Curatorial passivity was first experienced in this context as a problem: as a researcher, I joined a project led by Koen Brams, director of the Jan van Eyck academie (2000-2010) in Maastricht, who had invited Mullican to work with essential elements from his archive. I got on board of the project mid-way and I was not at the initiative of it; in addition, Mullican was scarcely present in Maastricht and it was therefore difficult to engage with him in conversation regarding my own research questions; finally, the role of the curator was strangely absent of the project; of the two persons most involved in the project, Koen Brams and the artist Suchan Kinoshita, did not claim such a position. Thus I experienced the awkward situation of feeling that the role that I was habitually fulfilling was somehow cast aside through a series of relational dynamics central to the project. I never explicitly put it in those words to Koen Brams, and yet, this given situation presented to me both a problem and an opportunity: on the one hand, I had no specific role to play, I was not needed or useful in any ways I could easily recognize from my institutional experience. On the other hand, this situation offered me the opportunity to invent my own role detached from habitual institutional expectations, despite the fact that other institutional demands rapidly found their way to me, such as presenting a lecture at the Jan van Eyck academie or supporting the organization of exhibitions and events. I thus found myself confronted with the necessity to hold on a certain form of identity that I felt could be taken away from me – being dispossessed of my curatorial practice – but I also found myself in front of a rare opportunity of being able to invent how I could inscribe my curatorial practice outside of any designated role or function. What I experienced was indeed paradoxical: although I was actively involved, my usual curatorial role was challenged. As a young female curator, I also found myself struggling to get the attention and interest of an older, well-known, male artist. I quickly realized that these emotions were deeply problematic in the sense that they appeared quite self-indulgent. From that point on, I tried to find a different path, both theoretically and practically, through the questions I was confronted with.

The concept of passivity which emerged from my exploration of hypnosis¹⁹², allowed me to name the position in which the role of the curator was placed. I later engaged with the relationship between the figure of the hypnotist and the figure of the witch, examining further the relationship to gender that these figures proposed. I turned this comparative study on the hypnotist and the witch into a text whose performative potential was explored through collaboration with the dramaturge Morgane Lory [Fig 14 – 15], and was tested out in public as part of the exhibition *Plus ou moins sorcières* curated by Anna Colin¹⁹³. I also valued more positively the existence of a curatorial space destined to be collectively used by a group of people without specific emphasis on anyone, finding in the conversations with Brams and Kinoshita a very precious material for my own research and practice – for example, the experience of putting up the exhibition of one hundred pages of Mullican’s notebooks was a really interesting physical experience, which found echo in my later invitation to the artist Jean-Pascal Flavien to appropriate the staging of Mullican’s work as an architectural substitute to Flavien’s own architectural structures¹⁹⁴. [Fig16 – 17] In the context of my curatorial research taking Mullican’s performances under hypnosis as an object of study, curatorial passivity thus described the disruption, displacement and dispossession of disciplined professional expectations.

Through awareness of curatorial passivity, the professional template assigned by art institutions to the curator no longer functions. We might assume that, in such a renewed geography of relationships and practices, other professional functions, such as the artist, no

¹⁹² My exploration of hypnotic phenomena took place through the reading of different books, including the works of Leon Chertok, François Roustang, Milton E. Erickson, Mikkel Borch Jacobsen, or Isabelle Stengers, including articles from different disciplines, such as philosophy, anthropology as well as medical studies or psychology. I organised encounters with practitioners in different fields of hypnosis, including Frédérique Honoré, anesthetist and hypnotherapist; Vicente de Moura, Jungian psychotherapist practicing hypnosis; Veronica Fyland, therapist specialised in alternative treatments such as hypnosis, regression or crystal healing. Through these encounters I had the opportunity to experience light states of hypnosis.

¹⁹³ The exhibition project titled ‘Plus ou Moins Sorcières’ unfolded across three separate exhibitions at Maison Populaire in Montreuil from 18 January – 15 December 2012. The first exhibition subtitled ‘Ambivalence d’une figure’ orchestrated the presentation of the issues of the former journal ‘Sorcières’, which was published in the 1970s in France, alongside a series of works by artists Pauline Boudry and Renate Lorenz, Candice Lin and Camille Ducellier as well as a series of live events, including performances by choreographer Latifa Laabissi; artist Mary Preston in collaboration with ethnographer Caroline Darroux; curator Vanessa Desclaux and dramaturge Morgane Lory in collaboration with Mathieu Canaguier.

¹⁹⁴ *PLAY* is a performance project that has been developed in the context of *No Drama House*, a work presented in the courtyard of galerie Giti Nourbakhsh in Berlin between 2009 and 2012. On May 10th, for the first performance of *PLAY*, Flavien moved the furniture of the house to Matt Mullican’s exhibition space at Hedah in Maastricht. On May 11th, Flavien, with the complicity of Vanessa Desclaux who invited him to move, arranged furniture as well as words, texts, readings and other moments. At Hedah *PLAY* appeared as an extension of the house and a temporary change of address in the context of Mullican’s practice, which has had a fundamental influence on Flavien’s work.

longer determine the identity of a figure; roles and functions are no longer *identitarian*. Each figure is essentially dispossessed of their identity as an essential ‘refusal to stay in one’s proper place’.¹⁹⁵ This form of dispossession is a form of passivity insofar as it relies on ‘disposition, exposure and self-othering’¹⁹⁶ and yet, this form of dispossession is self-dispossession; it is not forced upon being by others but instead appears as a crucial dimension of being in relation to others through a mode of relationality that dissents from a liberal mode of sociality based on property and sovereignty. In this context, curatorial passivity does not suggest an erasure of authorship but rather has the ambition to define what authorship can or could be, detached from the notions of property and sovereignty. Curatorial passivity therefore challenges notions of faculty, aptitude, or competency in a neo-liberal context that has achieved a form of flattening out competencies as a consequence of permanent competition. Through the use of the term ‘passivity’ in the framework of curatorial practice, I attempt to name a regime of attention and of action that embraces the empathetic desire to engage with a specific artistic practice and allow it to affect and alter the curator’s position: curatorial passivity came to be named when working with an artist within a situation where the curator is not expected and does not fulfil a function; at first, this curatorial passivity was experienced as a negative form of dispossession, and yet, the investigation that I embarked upon allowed me to envision something more essential, that is, a form of dispossession generating a different disposition to the affective properties, in this case based on Mullican’s work. The paradox of passivity giving agency is aligned with Butler and Athanasiou:

In a world of differentially shared sociality, if we are already ‘outside ourselves’, beyond ourselves, given over, bound to others, and bound by claims that emerge from outside or from deep inside ourselves; our very notion of responsibility requires this sense of dispossession as disposition, exposure and self-othering.¹⁹⁷

In the context of curatorial practice, passivity cannot be understood from the generic perspective of critique and opposition, or of achievement and affirmation. Curatorial passivity can only be envisioned in the micro-political context of the relationships that bind together curators and artists to a situation in which objects, institutions, performers, spectators and other possible subjects of operation and mediation might be involved. In the following section, I will introduce an important initiative led by curator Clementine Deliss in the 1990s

¹⁹⁵ Judith Butler and Athéna Athanasiou, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013), Chapter 2, page 18, Kindle for mac.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 10, page 4, Kindle edition for mac.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, Chapter 10, pages 3 and 4, Kindle edition for mac.

related to her work with the Senegalese collective Laboratoire AGIT-art, viewing it as a prime example of encounter that forces a fundamental displacement of the figure of the curator.

Clementine Deliss proposed the metaphor of free-fall to describe her curatorial encounter with the Senegalese art scene, and more particularly her long-standing collaboration with the Senegalese collective Laboratoire AGIT-art since 1992. She writes:

Imagine you are in flight. You believe you may be moving from one geographical location to another and you are prepared. But as you travel across space you find yourself looking downwards and within rather than beyond the clouds which surround you. ... As you move on what appears to be a stable horizontal axis, you suddenly realize that you are in free-fall, no longer moving ahead but shifting diagonally and downwards, catching and locking into different gravities.¹⁹⁸

In the context of elucidating curatorial passivity, and explicitly demonstrating its links to spectatorship and agency, I wish to explore briefly here Deliss's description of her participation in Laboratoire AGIT-art and her discussion about her curatorial position in the framework of this dimension of her practice.

Deliss gave an account in her article published in the journal *Afterall* of 'her personal contact with artists, philosophers, writers and politicians-in-the-wings who lived and worked in Dakar in the 1990s', which included 'the Laboratoire AGIT-art, of which [she has] been a member since 1995, and also the manifestations of Tenq and Huit Facettes, both important artist-run initiatives that, like the Laboratoire AGIT-art, were driven in great part by the curatorial work of Senegalese artist El Sy'. Deliss further explains:

At the time, my engagement with these collectives constituted a form of extended practice, beyond producing exhibitions. Indeed, exhibiting these artists and their group projects was perhaps the least productive curatorial channel through which to mediate their practice. Instead, performances, workshops, think tanks and the publishing organ *Metronome*, first produced in Dakar in 1996, helped to convey both the specificity of our collaborations and the differentiated models of documentation that represented and communicated this work.¹⁹⁹

In advance of most theorization of 'the curatorial', Deliss characterized her participation in the Senegalese collective as a form of extended curatorial practice outside of the habitual

¹⁹⁸ Clementine Deliss, 'Free fall – freeze frame', in *Thinking about exhibitions*, 275.

¹⁹⁹ Clémentine Deliss, 'Brothers in Arms: Laboratoire AGIT-art and Tenq in Dakar in the 1990s', *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry*, Issue 36 (Summer 2014), 4 –19.

context of exhibitions. And yet, when she described the moment of her official integration to the collective in London in 1995, she talked about a moment of collective writing with Issa Samb that took place in the context of the events she curated as part of ‘africa95’.²⁰⁰ These different aspects of her curatorial practice were thus not so easily differentiated. In Deliss’s work, I claim that a form of curatorial passivity can be located in forms of practice in which the habitual role and function of the curator as producer of knowledge — through the form of critical interpretation and analytical classifications — sanctioned by institutions is disrupted through other modes of production that rely on collective production, blurring the boundaries of art with other forms of knowledge; for example, the relationship to literary fictions in the context of the magazine *Metronome* which Deliss co-founded, and to other practices through Laboratoire AGIT-art’s inclusion of cinema, theatre, psychiatry, or economy in the large scope of its interests. Deliss writes:

Micro-government. And again, or once more, as before, they meet. The lawyer, the economist, the philosopher, the film-maker, the curator. Everyday at 4 p.m., the majority of this micro-government convenes. And, repeating antecedents, emphasising solutions, naming the past, they discuss the breakdown of agriculture, the fate of farmers, the World Bank and its misfired attention and, underneath all of this, they seek parallels and wait for rain to fall, as if the parched land could only be rescued through the definition of actions.²⁰¹

Deliss’s use of the terms, employed to qualify professional functions in the quotation above, has a metamorphic impact, collapsing a traditional typology and transforming them into dramaturgic figures. Deliss’s metaphor of free-fall designates an acknowledgement of passivity in curatorial practice as it materializes a form of loss of control, which is further

²⁰⁰ ‘In London in September 1995, after working together for three years, El Sy and Issa Samb informed me that I had been co-opted into the Laboratoire AGIT’art. Their invitation to join the collective coincided with a high point in our collaboration: an unusual lecture held at the ‘africa95’ conference ‘Mediums of Change’, chaired by the late Stuart Hall, to which Issa Samb had been invited to speak about the visual arts of Africa. The night before the event, in classic AGIT’art methodology, he entrusted me with the task of typing, translating and editing his oral contribution, and delegated the visual dimension of the conference to El Sy. The next day, the three of us lined up on stage and Samb began speaking in Wolof, Senegal’s national language, then abruptly switched into French. As soon as I sensed a pause in his speech, I would utter a rejoinder in English, reading out sections of the text that we had composed together Issa Samb and I continued alternating between languages while El Sy projected a kaleidoscope of slides that depicted everything from street scenes in Dakar to people, artworks and performances. Combined with the spoken word, the shower of disparate images created multiple layers of communication without ever proposing a clear position of authority or expertise. Samb had performed the antithesis of an art-historical exegesis: a complex group action and lyrical discourse unexpected within the academic setting of the conference, and dismissed by many as sheer obfuscation.’ Clementine Deliss, ‘Brothers in Arms: Laboratoire AGIT’art and Tenq in Dakar in the 1990s’, *Afterall* Issue 36 (Summer 2014)

²⁰¹ Clementine Deliss, unpublished notes, August 2002, in Clementine Deliss, ‘Brothers in Arms: Laboratoire AGIT’art and Tenq in Dakar in the 1990s’, *Afterall* Issue 36 (Summer 2014).

accounted for in her attempt at describing her unstable position within the Laboratoire AGIT-art collective. She writes:

To submerge oneself in the formulation of new practices, which involve the critic and curator as much as the artist in a new technology of representation, can feel precarious and lacking in analytical distance.²⁰²

Twenty years separate her essay on the notion of free-fall from her article published in *Afterall*, and yet the form of curatorial practice that Deliss engaged in then continues to appear as precarious today as it was in the 1990s; one might even think that today's forms of 'experimentation and short-term release from the economic machinery of the dominant artworld and exhibition-making' are more difficult to achieve.²⁰³ In the description of her practice, Deliss calls on an experiential register that relies on distancing oneself from known cultural and political context, abandoning usual modes of working, and stripping down one's usual role and function. Deliss refers to experiences that position her simultaneously as an attentive and desiring spectator, and as a storyteller who has the ability to recount these lived experiences in other cultural and artistic contexts. Passivity in the context of curatorial practice helps naming the act of voluntarily disengaging oneself from assigned role and function in favour of another form of agency, and action.

²⁰² Deliss, 'Free fall – freeze frame', 292

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 286

Section II.2 — From passivity to dispossession: The urgency of imagining anew the ethics of (curatorial) practice

As stated, the analogy between hypnosis and curatorial practice allowed me imagine a form of curatorial passivity through which I could envision a different approach to a complex ensemble of power and knowledge relations. In the following section of this chapter, I will continue to expand on how the renewed conception of passivity that I am trying to unfold here provides a crucial set of ideas through which one can critically rethink the production of subjectivity in the context of curatorial practice. Working through the contributions of Michel Foucault, Isabelle Stengers, and Michel de Certeau, I will attempt to explore fields of research and modes of thought that provide critical propositions toward unsettling the notion of a curatorial subject: I claim that fundamental approaches of the deconstruction of the concept of subject, undoing its ideological unity and identity, haven't yet sufficiently informed a rethinking of the figure of the curator. Through Foucault, I will consider the subject as essentially embodied; this subject is entangled in a complex balance of power relations he or she is subject of and subjected to, thus demonstrating the inescapable dependence of active and passive forms of subject formation. Moreover, with Foucault, I will claim that the contemporary subject is caught in a culture of self that determines the production of subjectivity, and will consider how a differently positioned ethics of the self makes available a production of subjectivity that profoundly transform the relation to self and to others. Then I will try to capture the possible forms of resistance to the obsession with individuality and authorship, as well as the market-driven logic of capitalism through examples of non-conforming practices defined by Michel de Certeau as mystic practices. Certeau's research into mystic writing — as well as Isabelle Stengers's reflection on animism — extend, with much complicity, Foucault's critique of interiority in regards to the subject, by addressing the fundamental issue of the experience of speaking and writing the other, and considering alterity in relation to oneself as well as others.

Section II.2.1 — The ethics of caring: Passivity, desire and displacement

Through a critical engagement with Western philosophy's metaphysical obsession with the issue of the subject, Foucault considers the subject insofar as it is caught in an ensemble of knowledge and power relations. 'Subject' is simultaneously the subject of something and is being subjected to something, both constituted and self-constituting. Through Foucault, the concept of subject no longer refers to individual existence in a metaphysical sense but to a position where the discursive practices that constitute human beings as subjects change across different periods of history. In this context, Foucault argues that 'it was necessary to look for the forms and modalities of the relation to the self by which the individual constitutes and recognizes himself qua subject'.²⁰⁴ The production of subjectivity functions as a third term in relation to knowledge and power:

After first studying the games of truth (*jeux de vérité*) in their interplay with one another, as exemplified by certain empirical sciences in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and then studying their interaction with power relations, as exemplified by punitive practices — I felt obliged to study the games of truth in the relationship of self with self, and the forming of oneself as a subject.²⁰⁵

Foucault's approach to the subject considers processes of subjectification as forces that exert themselves on the life of human beings whose subjectivity is thus constituted by and through different external practices and techniques, and which raises the issue of possible acts of resistance to these forces. Foucault's subject is defined through the techniques that constitute him or herself as a subject, 'that is, with the way in which the individual establishes his relation to the rule and recognizes himself as obliged to put it into practice'.²⁰⁶ These rules constitute a moral code and the subject is therefore first and foremost a moral subject.²⁰⁷

Foucault's approach unsettles the relation between activity and passivity related to the traditional conception of the subject, as he no longer considers the subject as an active position nor as a position of agency. From Foucault's perspective, the very terms of activity and passivity no longer function. He states that the subject has become an object of knowledge, under scrutiny from many different disciplines — philosophical, medical, psychiatric, sociological, etc. — that demand that the subject masters an intimate knowledge of him or herself. This demand forces constraining confessions, introducing forms of moral

²⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Viking, 1986), 6.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 11.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

and social control. In his investigation of the constitution of the modern subject, Foucault claims the most determining character is that of sexuality, and proposes to examine the notion of a 'sexual subject or desiring subject' through an exploration of

the practices by which individuals were led to focus their attention on themselves, to decipher, recognize, and acknowledge themselves as subjects of desire, bringing into play between themselves and themselves a certain relationship that allows to discover, in desire, the truth of their being, be it natural or fallen.²⁰⁸

Foucault's approach to ethics consisted in looking back to the concept of moral code and ethical conduct in Greek and Roman civilisations, distinguishing the values and rules that constitute the moral code of an epoch from the ethical work that individuals had to practice in order to transform their behaviour and achieve a moral conduct.

We will call 'philosophy' the form of thought that asks what is it that enables the subject to have access to the truth and which attempts to determine the conditions and limits of the subject's access to the truth. If we call this 'philosophy', then I think we could call 'spirituality' the search, practice and experience through which the subject carries out the necessary transformations on himself in order to have access to the truth. We will call 'spirituality' then the set of these researches, practices, and experiences, which may be purifications, ascetic exercises, renunciations, conversions of looking, modifications of existence, etc., which are, not for knowledge but for the subject, for the subject's very being, the price to be paid for access to the truth.²⁰⁹

Foucault emphasizes that the practices of the self that constitute ethical work have been left out of the modern practice of philosophy. Through his use of the terms philosophy and spirituality, Foucault asserts a crucial distinction between the knowledge of the self and the care of the self. By distinguishing 'knowledge of the subject' from 'the being itself of the subject', he separates a classical concept of the subject based on representation and a modern concept of the subject considering the subject's embodied experience. Foucault writes:

It is no longer their identity that beings manifest in representation, but the external relation they establish with the human being.²¹⁰

Representation maintains a distinction between the self and the other, between identity and difference, and can only conceive of the relation to the other through knowledge. But Foucault positions the physical body at the centre of his approach of the subject:

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁰⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject, Lectures at the College de France 1981-1982* (New York: Picador, New York, 2005), 15.

²¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *The Order of things* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 341.

to man's experience a body has been given, a body which is his body — a fragment of ambiguous space, whose peculiar and irreducible spatiality is nevertheless articulated upon the space of things.²¹¹

In his attempt to rethink contemporary subjectivity, Foucault emphasizes the impossibility to separate power and knowledge from a third term, the carnal dimension through which the subject is conceived: 'the spatiality of the body, the yawning of desire, and the time of language'.²¹² Foucault's care of the self, which he defines as 'the ensemble of conditions of spirituality', supposes that

for the subject to have right of access to the truth he must have changed, transformed, shifted, and become, to some extent and up to a certain point, other than himself.²¹³

Foucault's conception of spirituality through the notion of the care of the self brings forward a production of subjectivity that is caught in a set of tensions: the subject might obey or resist the forces exerted on him or her in order to make him or her conform to a rule. Foucault moves beyond the moral subject determined by power and knowledge in order to present a subject of desire, while the production of subjectivity intimately depends on the life of the subject. In calling on the notion of the care of the self, Foucault suggests the necessity to carry out exercises that would allow governing oneself and transforming one's form of life. The aspiration to an ethical life implies both shaping the relation to oneself and the relation to others, and has an impact on dimensions of one's life that are not only intimate and personal but also professional, collective, and public. For Foucault, rethinking our relationship to the self allows the possibility for a transformation of the production of subjectivity, and this appears as our fundamental task. He writes:

We find it almost impossible to constitute an ethic of the self, even though it may be an urgent, fundamental, and politically indispensable task, particularly urgent if it is true that there is no first or final point of resistance to political power other than in the relationship one has to oneself.²¹⁴

This transformation of the notion of subjectivity reintroduces the concept of care of the self, in order to imagine a contemporary form of ethics anew. Although Foucault did not abandon

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 342.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 343.

²¹³ Foucault, *The Hermeneutics of the Subject*, 15.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 252.

I would like to thank Grant Watson for his most interesting essay — in which he mentions this very passage — in relation to his on-going research departing from Foucault's notion of the Care of the Self, developed in his lectures at the College de France under the title of *The Hermeneutics of the Subject* and in the last two volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*. Grant Watson, *How We Behave* (Amsterdam: If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part of Your Revolution, 2014).

the concept of morality, his approach of ethics focused on the necessity for human beings to achieve more autonomy by engaging with ethical work and determining the conduct they need to adopt to achieve the form of life they have freely chosen. Engaging with the notion of care of the self through Foucault's work opens up a set of tensions between obedience and resistance, the respect and disrespect of values and rules, which constitute the moral code generated by prescriptive institutions.

Curatorial practice was traditionally founded on a notion of the care of objects, associated with forms of historicization and conservation of significant elements of material culture, including works of art. Contemporary curatorial practice has increasingly been confronted with forms of artistic practices that urge it to enlarge its relationship to the care of living beings, social relations, ephemeral and immaterial elements. Today such a concept of care defines professional roles that act behind the scenes, in the framework of conservation and production at a distance from the claims of authorship emanating from curators. Care, rather than determining a fundamental function of curatorial practice, is mobilized in defining one of the personality traits shared by some curators, as well as professional roles distinct of, though complementary to, the role of the curator. The ethical dimension of care might even appear as contradictory to the entrepreneurial logic at work within curatorial practice: care indeed might demand forms of dedication and attention that slow down the entrepreneurial development of curatorial activities. In this context, Foucault's concept of care — of the self, of life, of others — might present an opportunity to rethink the notion of caring in the context of curatorial practice.

In a recent essay, Stefan Nowotny engaged with the fable told by the Latin author Hyginus about the allegorical character named Cura — a fable that Novotny encountered in the work of German philosophers Martin Heidegger and Hans Blumenberg. Nowotny summons Cura in order to address the 'complexities, complications and complicities' at the heart of the contemporary figure of the curator, and to expose the scope of responsibilities that are entangled in the seemingly limited task of caring. He writes:

It is impossible to separate the task of overseeing valuable and significant objects or artefacts from specifically designed procedures of valorization and signification, and hence from a historical production of specific object-types and of specific subjectivities to endorse them. Second, these procedures were also closely linked to not only a broader constellation of economico-political powers and dominations, but

also to the emergence of new fields of knowledge ... and of new practices of dispatch and contemplation.²¹⁵

Nowotny argues that the allegory of Cura also reveals the issue of self-mirroring and self-entanglement — which Nowotny, after Blumenberg, determines as ‘narcissism of care’ — as well as the ‘lowliness’ associated with such a task that present-day curators have often attempted to understate. If we return to Foucault, we may recall that the care of the self is not in contradiction with the care of others; on the contrary, the care of the self appears, in Foucault’s view, as an essential practice in order to care for others given that the care of the self is at the basis of an ethics in pursuit of moral conduct. In different ways, both Foucault and Nowotny encourage us to reconsider the significance of the care of the self as well as the task of caring; yet, they both expose the insolvable tensions that come with caring, stressing that the challenge of ethics is not the obedience to a normative set of values and rules — which may reduce the task of caring to a monotonous and uninspiring set of activities — but a constant negotiation between obedience and resistance; a demanding work of thought that bears the responsibility of constituting oneself as an autonomous subject, irresistibly caught in a web of dependencies, and collapsing the caricatured opposition between passivity and activity, dependence and independence.

The task of caring lies at the core of curator Pierre Bal Blanc’s engagement with artists and their works. In Bal Blanc’s work, this task is questioned by the function of the body and through an embodied relationship with the artists and their work, along with the place of desire and pleasure in that relationship. In 2009, a performance by Sanja Ivekovic *Eve’s game*, [Fig 18] premiered in the context of Bal Blanc’s project titled ‘Reversibility’, and was later presented in another of Bal Blanc’s curatorial projects, ‘la Monnaie Vivante’.²¹⁶ [Fig 19

²¹⁵ Stefan Nowotny, ‘The Curator Crosses the River: a Fabulation’, in *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Chapter 6, page 8, Kindle edition for mac.

²¹⁶ On the invitation of the festival *Faits D’Hiver*, dedicated to contemporary dance, Bal-Blanc brought together, under the name ‘La Monnaie Vivante’, titled after the eponymous essay by Pierre Klossowski written in 1971, and over a period of three days, works by artists from different generations, and distinct historical and geographical contexts within the dance studio of *Micadanses* in the centre of Paris. The exhibition ‘La Monnaie Vivante’ was presented again in other locations: in 2007 at STUK in Leuven, Belgium; in 2008 at Tate Modern, London, United Kingdom; in 2010 at Teatr Dramatyczny, on the invitation of the Museum of contemporary art in Warsaw, Poland, and at theatre Hebbel am Ufer (HAU) in the context of the 6th Berlin Biennale in Berlin, Germany. At each of these locations, the exhibition displayed works that encompassed the fields of sculpture, installation and performance. If certain works were present in the space over the entire duration of the exhibition, other works, taking the form of performance or live actions, appeared at different times each day, in agreement between the artists and the curator. Visitors of the exhibition were therefore unable to see the same constellation of works twice in the space, and yet if they persisted in attending the exhibition over a longer period of time, they could see the same work repeated several times in one day, and again the following day. There was not any physical separation between the space occupied by the works and the space occupied by the visitors; there was

– 20 – 21 – 22] Ivekovic's work is based on a historical photograph taken by Julian Wasser during the Marcel Duchamp retrospective at the Pasadena Art Museum in 1963. It shows Duchamp playing a game of chess with the model Eve Babitz sitting naked in front of him. This image was restaged by Ivekovic as a performance. The artist physically took the place of Duchamp and placed the curator, responsible for inviting her to produce the project, naked in front of her. For the second time Bal-Blanc took the position of the performer in an artist's work. In comparison to his performance in Felix Gonzalez Torres's work *Untitled (go-go dancing platform)*, a component of Gonzalez Torres's solo exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg in 1992, in which he performed in order to earn a living, he took part in *Eve's Game* as a reflection of his curatorial function in the exhibition. With Bal-Blanc in the role of the nude model, Ivekovic was acknowledging his curatorial position as a position of power — the power of instituting, the power to take action — all the while overtly undermining this position by exposing Bal-Blanc naked in front of his audience. I claim that, by accepting to participate in Ivekovic's piece, Bal-Blanc also revealed the ambivalence of his curatorial position, trading a habitual form of distance and detachment with the desire to reclaim another kind of experience; a perverted use of his curatorial function. On the one hand, this action emphasized the relationship of power that exists between artist and curator; and on the other hand, it revealed the passivity of the curator made visible by Ivekovic's use of his body and negation of his full control over the situation he had in fact constructed. The work also depended on Bal Blanc in multiple ways. It directly involved his body, which is unusual, and altered Bal-Blanc's subjective position, explicitly objectifying him and turning the artist-curator relationship upside down by literally exposing the curator. Through the process of the performance, Bal-Blanc produced a distinct subjective position and gave access to an embodied form of subjectivity that is unsettled and moves between prescribed power relations, passivity and agency, objectification and subjectivity. His (naked) presence successively reincarnates the puppet and the puppeteer, and blurs the distinction between identified gendered roles: Ivekovic instructed Bal-Blanc to embody the role of Eve Babitz, and through Babitz, to perform as a stand-in for her own body, the body of a woman set within a distribution of roles organized by art history, and further, society. For the exhibition 'la Monnaie Vivante' Bal-Blanc presented a multiplicity of positions that exist between the figure of the subject as fictive unity and the figure of the fetish object. The exhibition space was a proliferation of acts of embodiment, incarnations and delegations,

no indication given of any sort of limit, or line of separation between organisers, artists, performers, objects and visitors.

situated in reference to economic and social realities as well as the intimacy of individual identity and sexual practices. Through a dispersion that reflected the attempt at redistributing his own subjectivity across the bodies of others, Bal-Blanc proposed the construction of a ‘queer’ exhibition space as the site of the production of a queer subjectivity, questioning the production of normative structures whether it concerns sexual identity, economic production, political authority, or the way we build filiations and genealogies.²¹⁷ For Bal-Blanc, the exhibition is no longer anyone’s object; it no longer belongs to anyone. It displaces authority, or disperses it across different figures; letting the figure of the curator emerge as an undecided, queer position. From the example taken of Bal Blanc’s work, I would claim that curatorial practice produces different figures — rather than professional functions or identities — that one can inhabit and move between in a constant state of displacement. The task of caring unveils movements of withdrawal and of acceptance, of obedience and resistance, of preservation and alteration. Caring thus produces a position that detaches itself from notions of knowledge, property, and sovereignty. As Nowotny suggests, the task of caring might be the point of departure for inventing a ‘new field of possible explorations’ for curatorial practice:

A new field of knowledges? Rather a new epistemology if we recall that the formation of knowledge might also have to be freed from its narcissistic implications ... A new field of practices? Rather a new praxeology, or even ethics, given that it is precisely not about mere compensations of former engagements or simple replacements of older activities through newer or more ‘contemporary’ ones, but about the condition of engagement as such and the ‘untimely’ opening of new temporalities.²¹⁸

My interpretation of Bal Blanc’s reclaiming of a curatorial agency that mobilized passivity in the framework of Ivekovic’s work runs the danger of being a misreading, in the sense that Bal Blanc might disagree with such an assertion of the re-possession of agency in the context of

²¹⁷ Here the term ‘queer’ does not adequately overlap with gender and queer theories. I used the term ‘queer’ in regards to Bal-Blanc’s approach of the production and inhabitation of the exhibition space in order to designate Bal Blanc’s engagement with notions of impurity and perversion, informed by his reading of Klossowski. Bal Blanc also engaged with issues related to sexuality and gender in his practice, for example through his work with artist Terre Thaemlitz, and he questioned the parallel between the divisions at work within sexuality and the divisions within the cultural field. In this context, as part of a panel discussion including Terre Thaemlitz, art historian Elizabeth Lebovici, choreographer François Chaignaud and artist and writer Ian White, Bal-Blanc asked: ‘Is the new figure of the curator a symptom of the domestication of a practice by the institution and the market or is it the emergence of an intermediate or even queer position?’. Bal-Blanc’s acknowledgement and claim that the curator can potential embody a queer position is central in my reading of *la Monnaie Vivante*. http://www.cacbreteigny.com/inhalt/SEX_text_uk.html.

²¹⁸ Nowotny, ‘The Curator Crosses the River: a Fabulation’, Chapter 6, page 12, Kindle edition for mac.

his position, and his role, in Ivekovic's work. I claim that this act of misreading is crucial to curatorial practice. The sense of danger in regards to misinterpretating and misunderstanding has been integral to the work I am attempting to do regarding passivity, echoing also the work of Butler and Athanasiou regarding dispossession, which acknowledged the ambivalence inherent to such a concept. The possibility of error, and the opportunity of lying, will be further explored in the following sections of this thesis in relation to the concept of fabulation.

Section II.2.2 — Ethical and experimental forms of practice: Passivity, hospitality and dispossession

In his essay titled ‘The Laugh of Michel Foucault’, Michel de Certeau writes:

To be classified the prisoner of a place and qualifications, to wear the stripes of authority which procure for the faithful their official entry into a discipline, to be pigeonholed within a hierarchy of domains of knowledge (*savoir*) and of positions, thus finally to be ‘established’ — that, for Foucault, was the very figure of death. ‘No, no.’ Identity freezes the gesture of thinking. It pays homage to an order. To think, on the contrary, is to pass through; it is to question that order, to marvel that it exists, to wonder what made it possible, to seek, in passing over its landscape, traces of the movement that formed it, to discover in these histories supposedly laid to rest ‘how and to what extent it would be possible to think otherwise’.²¹⁹

Foucault’s systematic effort at unsettling identity and authority — especially that of traditional Western philosophy — and his refusal to be pigeonholed in a specific academic discipline mirrors Certeau’s own intellectual positioning in relation to his status as a historian. Certeau has ceaselessly blurred the limits of his so-called discipline, taking great liberties in crossing other disciplines such as theology, anthropology, psychoanalysis, and literature, but also, and very importantly so, constantly testing his historical work against the question of historiography in order to reflect on the methodological problems of writing the history of absent subjects, of events that he did not experience; problems inherent to the act of cutting through and excluding in order to fabricate a past in the urgency of the present. Certeau founds his practice upon the crucial distinction between himself and his object of study, and yet affirms the essential alteration of his subjectivity in contact with the alterity that this object embodies.²²⁰ In this context, Certeau’s own practice of history is a mode of doing that echoes his conceptualization of a tactic — distinct from what he designates as a ‘strategy’ — which ‘belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other’s place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance’,²²¹ For Certeau, the historian does not inherit the past, but he is rather indebted to it.

The balance of power appears here completely redistributed as the figure of the historian

²¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, ‘The Laugh of Michel Foucault’, in *Heterologies* (The University of Minnesota, 2010), 194.

²²⁰ François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau : un historien de l’altérité*, Texte inédit, conférence à Mexico, septembre 2003. Last accessed 9 July 2015. URL: http://www.ihtp.cnrs.fr/historiographie/sites/historiographie/IMG/pdf/Dosse_Certeau_historien_de_l_alterite.pdf (Translation is mine).

²²¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of everyday life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), xix.

embodied by Certeau acknowledges his debt to the absent subjects whose history he has set himself the task of writing, and claims a reciprocal relationship to be based on alteration: the historian is fundamentally altered through his work, dispossessed of his identity as he takes on the task of writing the history of an other. He also claims his paradoxical capacity of altering the past, displacing events into the present, and thus fabricating history through his work. Though in doing so, Certeau demonstrated his concern with the ethics of his practice, defining the figure of the historian that he embodied as the figure of the wanderer, in movement, always passing and researching; searching for historical subjects that reveal themselves as essentially unstable, difficult to grasp, which in turn destabilized his own mode of thinking, moving him away from himself. In my project, Certeau's investigation of his own practice, and specifically his incessant questioning of his relationship with his objects of research, has served as a crucial model for me to think of the ethics and politics of curatorial practice. In the following sections, I intend to write through texts by Certeau, Stengers and Nancy in order to problematize the agency of the curator. My aim is to position this curatorial agency within a complex network of relationships that call on dispossession, possession, experience, experimental, alterity, and alteration; making it impossible to oppose passivity and activity, care and production. Through the sections that follow, I wish to declare a series of analogies between the practice of the curator and the practices of the historian, of the scientist, of the economist, of the anthropologist, of the philosopher, in which Certeau, Stengers and Nancy anchor their experience, and from which they are urged to write.

There is a sense that Certeau's approach to practice as a historian mirrors the practices that constitute his objects of study. One of the most important research projects he carried out was on the figures of mystic thought from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Certeau set himself the task to propose an approach to mystic thought in the context of his practice of writing history. He kept coming back to mystic thought because, as an object of study, any attempt at a proper scientific analysis fails. As Certeau suggested, scientific research — as that applied to the context of social sciences — proceeds by cutting through specific objects of study. These objects of research have to be outlined in a way that makes a scientific analysis possible. Certeau considered mystic thought as an object that, on the contrary, constantly exceeds any scientific framing and division. He paid interest in the epistemological function of mystic thought, remarking that although mystic thought is concerned with what positive sciences cannot absorb within the framework of an objective treatment of human facts, it nevertheless appears as experimental and focused on the production of knowledge —

Certeau designates them as ‘epistemic operations’ — that science can’t yet ‘problematize in its own terms’.²²² Thus mystic thought is seen as denied of a proper discipline, denied as a proper object of study. The definition of what Certeau names ‘the mystic’ appears absent. He writes:

Transitory objects. The phenomenon moves and transforms itself within the space that has been assigned to it. It is thus necessary to formally circumscribe what we understand under the name of ‘mystic’. Sisyphean task: the object ceaselessly falls out of the theoretical place where a definition positioned it.²²³

Certeau’s mystic is dispersed across different subjects, objects, and forms of practice. First, it points to individual biographies as particular trajectories and forms of speech invested in the ‘I’; there are as many forms of mystic as there are individuals considered as embodying this practice — of thinking and speaking. Secondly, the mystic characterizes a specific mode of discourse and form of speech that differs from traditional discursive forms, and is anchored in a corpus of textual documents of distinctive literary and poetic qualities. Finally, the mystic is a historical figure in the sense that it is specific to a period in the history of Western thought, which Certeau limits to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. However, Certeau importantly considered mystic thought within a given historical period only to register its presence beyond that determined timeline. His approach stems from the field of research itself, that is, from the fact that the object of study constantly escapes the scientific attempt to frame the analysis and circumscribe the object. It was necessary for Certeau to move beyond the traditional approach of scientific methodology and detach the notion of experimentation from the field of science, thus attempting to specify, as he did, the problem that we are confronted with when ‘mystic thought reappears in the context of social sciences’.²²⁴ In his review of existing literature on individual personalities defined as mystics and on the phenomenon defined as mysticism, Certeau became aware of the different pitfalls in the methodologies carried out by researchers of different fields within which the issue of mystic thought emerged as an object of study. Through the attempts to make mystic thought such an object of research, an entire dimension of the problem was left out. Certeau demonstrated that it is very difficult to reconcile two paradoxical dimensions of mystic thought: on the one hand, mystic thought is attached to individual trajectories, which in turn implies that mystic thought is fundamentally plural and entrenched in socially and historically determined

²²² Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)*, t. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 35.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 43.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 31.

situations; on the other hand, the plurality of approaches brought together under the name of the mystic point toward an epistemological function detached from social and historical particulars — a unique phenomenon that also needs to be grasped as such. Certeau's approach is critical of any scientific approach that would privilege one way of thinking at the expense of the other. For Certeau, it is essential to confront oneself with what in mystic thought resists its appropriation through scientific analysis. Certeau writes:

I do not pretend to trace a history of scientific assimilation of the mystic (a history that would begin with the project of colonizing it and would end with the necessity to eliminate it) — it would be a caricature —, not to take the functioning of 'mystic phenomena' as a possible indication of the recent evolution of social sciences — it would be a different task — but to suggest a singular 'historicity': the avatars of the mystic, products of contemporary disciplines, nevertheless produce proper effects as if, even in the context that transform them into objects of knowledge, the fragments of a 'savage science' conserved something irreducible.²²⁵

Certeau nevertheless continued to define his own approach as scientific and states,

Any scientific enterprise must renounce to hold the real in the objects that it cuts out within it. Its rigour founds itself on the limits that it determines. Learning to forget thus supports the production of knowledge.²²⁶

This considered, Certeau's approach confronts itself with the paradox at the heart of mystic thought by attempting to grasp his object of research from two perspectives: considering mystic thought as a discourse, which Certeau analysed through a corpus of texts that were at his disposal and carried throughout history in the form of writing; and as an experience, considering that from within the written texts, one can unveil mystical operations in the practice of language that point towards specific acts of doing.

Certeau thus set himself the task of exploring a large corpus of texts not to produce a historical research that departed from linguistic analysis but in order to explore a much broader field of research, one that branches out into the present time of the historian through that functional substitute of mystic thought that Certeau found in the context of philosophy, psychoanalysis, contemporary artistic and literary practices.²²⁷ One of the central claims that Certeau made in regard to this relation between a practice of language and a mode of doing is

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²²⁷ Marguerite Duras, Chantal Akerman for example.

the importance of enunciation in mystic thought. Certeau affirms that for the mystics the act of enunciation plays a primary role in regards to the content of discourse itself. The act of speaking — and of writing only by extension — is distinct from the validity of the statement and detached from the criteria of truth and knowledge. What appears central in mystic thought is that mystics share a common belief in God and an attempt at addressing this absent yet significant other. Mystic writing demonstrates its irrepressible desire to say the other and inhabit their experience of alterity through writing, because and despite of the difficulty to articulate such an experience in language. In this context, the mystic characterizes itself as an effort of sobriety and dispossession in order to transform one's body into the empty place that is necessary for differentiation. Mystic thought produces an active hospitality through its attempt to empty oneself from the 'I' and turn entirely oneself towards the absent other.

It is not only about getting rid of the artifices of the 'I'; it is also about composing a body from what is missing to being, that is to transform the lack into what creates a living, desiring and producing body.²²⁸

Through his study of mystic writing, Certeau claims that these specific phenomena defined through the term mystic reveal a field of critical positions that, beyond the theological questions that were historically central to them, allow us to situate them in the broader context of the politics of knowledge and of subject formation.

In his research, Certeau studied the phenomenon of the Loudun possessions, during which, in 1634 in France, a group of nuns of the Ursuline convent were believed to have been visited and possessed by demons. In relieving them of their possessed state, a local priest named Urbain Grandier was accused of performing witchcraft; convicted for his crimes through a trial led by the Catholic Church, he was later burned at the stake. Following this study, Certeau proposed a unique approach to possession suggesting that 'possession does not have a 'real' historical explanation since it is never possible to know who is possessed by whom'.²²⁹ The notion of possession, traditionally associated with the ascendancy of the devil, found in Certeau's work a resonance with a secularized notion of possession inherent to the mechanisms of subject formation in the modern context, in which the subject is produced by being subjected to a series of explicit rules and implicit norms of behaviour that are dictated

²²⁸ Jean-Daniel Causse, 'Le corps et l'expérience mystique. Analyse à la lumière de Jacques Lacan et de Michel de Certeau', *Cahiers d'études du religieux. Recherches interdisciplinaires* [En ligne], 13 | 2014, mis en ligne le 10 juillet 2014, consulté le 20 octobre 2015. URL : <http://cerri.revues.org/1345> ; DOI : 10.4000/cerri.1345 (Translation is mine).

²²⁹ Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris : Gallimard, 1990), 327 (Translation is mine).

by society and its institutions. Nevertheless, mystic thought emerges as an act positioned as a form of dissidence within traditional theological practice, and by extension, within social and political forms, of normalization.

This body is here indeed the witness of the desire of undoing a possession. It works towards ‘abandonment’, if you will. It intends to get rid of the corset that imprisons itself in codes, visions of oneself and of the world, ways of living and thinking. ...

There is here the will to get out of what speaks in the place of the subject, that wants for him or her, and crushes any expression of singular desire.²³⁰

In his introduction to the edited issue of *e-flux journal* on ‘animism’, curator Anselm Franke writes:

But this time it is not the sorcery of the animist other, but the modern and ‘capitalist sorcery’ (Isabelle Stengers) that keeps us spellbound, trapped within a set of false choices, within a systemic closure that suggests no alternatives, and does not cease to assimilate into clinical management its other and its outsides.²³¹

Animism suggests the possibility of a proliferation of entities disconnected from the subject, or rather, it considers that forms of subjectivity can be attributed to entities that are not considered as subject in the context of traditional Western thought. If animism and mystic thought evoke different geographies and periods in history, they also both embody an epistemological stage where the approach of Being, of identity, and of the subject as unique and stable entities is put into question. Like mystic thought, animism provides a framework for thinking of subjectivity in different terms, and more particularly it positions passivity at the core of thinking and of doing. Animism conceives of subjectivity as being caught in a proliferation of exchanges and circulation according to movements of contagion and displacement. Passivity appears central to this mode of thinking because animism considers that non-human entities can affect human beings; that the notion of possession, which we traditionally associate with the idea of ownership of material entities (objects, land, constructions, etc.), can be conceived as the force exerted by an object over a human being. Yet it would be reductive to consider animism as a simple reversal of the relations to and

²³⁰ Jean-Daniel Causse, ‘Le corps et l’expérience mystique. Analyse à la lumière de Jacques Lacan et de Michel de Certeau’, 5

²³¹ Anselm Franke, ‘Introduction – “Animism”’, *e-flux journal* #36 (July 2012). Last accessed 6 August 2013. URL: http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8955987.pdf

Franke curated the exhibition titled ‘Animism’, which premiered at Extra City Kunsthall Antwerpen in January 2010. Franke refers to Philippe Pignarre and Isabelle Stengers’ book titled *Capitalist Sorcery. Breaking the Spell* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

balance of power between human beings and objects. Stengers insists on animism's capacity to allow us to recover from separation, that is, the separation between the natural and the supernatural, the rational and the irrational, human beings and other material entities, and the limitation of a proliferation of beings to only two categories. Stengers proposes to consider subjectivity through an idea of multiplicity and of dispersion. She leaves the terms subjectivity and objectivity aside to instead make use of the term experience. In a sense likened to Certeau, she first addresses the notion of the experimental and writes:

In order to think sciences as an adventure, it is crucial to emphasize the radical difference between a scientific conquering 'view of the world' and the very special and demanding character of what I would call scientific 'achievements'. ... An experimental achievement may be characterized as the creation of a situation enabling what the scientists question to put their questions at risk, to make the difference between relevant questions and unilaterally imposed ones.²³²

As she expands on the possibility of a practice to be experimental, Stengers approaches the specific practice of writing:

Writing resists the 'either/or' dismembering of experience. It resists the choice between either the moon that 'really' offers us illumination, as an intentional subject would do, or the moon of the critique, just triggering what would 'really' be of human provenance. Writing is an experience of metamorphic transformation. It makes one feel that ideas are not the author's, that they demand some kind of cerebral — that is, bodily — contortion that defeats any preformed intention.²³³

In his analysis of Jean-Joseph Surin's essay 'La Science expérimentale',²³⁴ Certeau reflected on Surin's attempt to produce a text that narrated the period of life during which he found himself ill. It characterizes his illness from the dual perspectives of madness and damnation. Certeau's detailed analysis of Surin's discourse insists on the very terms used to qualify Surin's writing enterprise: 'science' and 'experimental'. Certeau emphasized that Surin positioned the narrator — Surin himself writing — at a distance from the object of his study

²³² Isabelle Stengers, 'Reclaiming Animism', *e-flux journal* #36 (July 2012): 02/10. Last accessed 6 August 2013. URL: http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_8955850.pdf

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ Jean Joseph Surin (1600-1665) was a French Jesuit, known for his role as exorcist in the events known as the Loudun possessions — which Michel de Certeau studied in his book *The Possession at Loudun*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2000. Surin published *la Science expérimentale des choses de l'autre vie acquise en la possession des Ursulines de Loudun* (1663) through which he attempts to give an account — in the form of a travel narrative — of the period of twenty three years during which he was ill, both mentally and physically.

— Surin’s past sufferings. This distance embodies Surin’s will to produce a ‘work whose subject is the object, an ‘experimental science’ that turns the very madness into the place of a knowledge of self’.²³⁵ Surin’s experimental science however conforms with traditional Western thought through which reason defines itself in complete opposition to madness. Surin looks back at himself from the perspective of recovery — he has been cured; he has recovered his reason. He thus refers to himself alternatively as ‘I’ and ‘he’, different positions of utterance distributed across the narrative that produce a dilated geography of the subject. Regarding such a division of the subject, Certeau emphasizes a fundamental paradox: Surin’s narrative brings to light a ‘reason, deprived of experience, [facing] an experience, deprived of reason’.²³⁶ Certeau claimed that this narrative manifests Surin’s crucial attempt to explore a specific distribution of knowledge — belief, power, and will that characterizes his experience of madness — that remains anchored in his faith in God. Certeau writes:

On the mode of belief and on the one of power, the question is unique: it concerns *the possibility of the possible* ... From this point of view, the narration of *La science expérimentale* deals with the possibility of any travel, or the possibility of another space. A question as mad as it is fundamental.²³⁷

In that sense, for Certeau — as it is for Stengers — the act of writing belongs to the experience as such: ‘Writing is not extrinsic to experience as if it described it from outside. It is part of it. It is itself an experimental science’. Finally, and this is essential here, Certeau proposed that Surin’s writing ‘invents a body’; through the narration of his experience, which writing inscribes in the present, Surin approached a whole set of physical sensations that developed knowledge in proximity with the senses. According to Certeau, Surin’s exploration of touch and of taste suggests ‘an erotic function indissociable from a relationship to *the other*’, and possesses ‘a value of knowledge that a visual relation to the *object* does not have’.²³⁸

Jean-Luc Nancy also outlined the strict association between the soul²³⁹ and the body, claiming that

²³⁵ Certeau, *La Fable Mystique* t.II, 234.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 244 (In italics in the original text).

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 251 (In italics in the original text).

²³⁹ The Latin etymology of the English word *soul* is *anima*, to which the term *animism* relates.

the soul, in all these “figures” of our tradition, doesn’t represent anything other than the body outside itself, or this other that the body is, structurally, for itself and in itself.²⁴⁰

Nancy thus attempts to articulate a concept of the body that refuses the notion of interiority, pleading that the body cannot be anything other than turned towards the outside, extended and exposed; he writes,

the body’s a thing of extension. The body is a thing of exposition. It’s not just that the body is exposed but that the body *consists* in being exposed.²⁴¹

Nancy claims that soul and body constitute the unity of the body, in the sense that it is the unity of the body outside of itself. He puts aside the notion of intention, through which subject and object are separated and placed in a hierarchical relation, and prefers to describe the unity of the body through the notions of articulation and experience. With these terms, Nancy attempts to qualify the tension and the intensity proper to the body. He writes:

The whole of experience is there, *in nuce*, in the experience of the body — in the experience that the body is. The soul is a name for the experience that the body *is*. *Experiri*, in Latin, is precisely going outside, leaving without a destination, crossing through something without knowing whether we will return from it. A body is what pushes to the limit, blindly, while groping, hence while touching.²⁴²

Through the different approaches proposed by Certeau, Stengers, and Nancy, body and experience are the terms through which we can challenge traditional conceptions of the subject; based on an endless series of separations and binary oppositions that have constituted the foundations of an entire system of value production, engendering social, economic, and political exclusion and discipline scientific and intellectual imaginaries. For both Certeau and Stengers, possession plays a central role as a possible articulation for new modes of thinking and doing. Stengers writes:

We could say that possession has changed direction here and has become a major stake: the change of disposition is a change of possessor, but it is not him who changes, it is rather his possessions that change. We are possessed by what we possess and what is at stake here is by what one should ‘be possessed’?²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘On the soul’, in *Corpus* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 126.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 134.

²⁴³ Isabelle Stengers, ‘William James. Naturalisme et pragmatisme au fil de la question de la possession’, *Philosophie des possessions*, ed. Didier Debaise (Dijon : les Presses du réel, 2011), 56 (Translation is mine).

In declaring allegiance to the approach of possession and dispossession defended by thinkers such as Certeau, Nancy, Stengers, Butler and Athanasiou, I attempt to support this perspective in the context of curatorial practice by envisioning a possibility for refusing the mainstream professional templates in which the figure of the curator is thought to fit, and in order to inhabit a multiplicity of different figures. I consider these figures as profoundly vital in the sense that they make it possible — for me, and I imagine for others — to pursue curatorial practice. Perhaps as I try to produce these figures through writing, these figures that I witness others inhabiting and that I intend to inhabit in turn, perhaps I mislead myself. Perhaps these figures force me to go astray, to dwell in many different art worlds, across different forms of artistic and curatorial practice, across different institutional contexts. And yet, my reading of Foucault and through him, Georges Canguilhem, led me to think that erring, making an error opens up the possibility to stray from the norm.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Michel Foucault, 'La vie : l'expérience et la science', In *Dits et Ecrits II : 1976 – 1988* (Paris : Gallimard, 2001), 1582 – 1595. I would like to thank the artist Julien Bismuth for introducing his own research on the concept of error in the context of the exhibition he showed at Bloomberg Space titled 'the error in the landscape', which I curated in 2010, and at the occasion of which he published 'the error in the landscape' (Rio de Janeiro: Devonian Press, 2010).

CHAPTER III — INHABITING A MULTIPLICITY OF FIGURES : I THINK, I SPEAK, I STUTTER, I FABULATE, I WITHDRAW

In the previous chapters, I intended to explore the current acts of subjection through which the figure of the curator establishes itself as subject, and in response to the dimensions of subjectivity that are undermined and dismissed under neo-liberal conditions, I uphold the possibility to imagine a different paradigm for the production of value and of subjectivity in curatorial practice. With this aim, I have tried to engage with concepts of spectatorship, passivity and care, reintroducing complexity and contradiction within a political, economic, and cultural framework that simplify their meaning and no longer assign positive value to them, deeming them as obsolete as well as politically and economically irrelevant. In this last chapter, I intend to go further with consideration to the conditions necessary to transform the production of subjectivity in the context of curatorial practice. The previous chapters function as forms of critique of existing circumstances, discourses, and practices, opening up onto examples of practice that purposely resist the modes of subjection inherent to neo-liberalism. However, in this chapter, I will attempt to move further, beyond a position of critique in order to unfold a more vital position of inhabitation made available through disposition and the renewed perspective on spectatorship and passivity. This chapter explores the field of complexities and of possibilities inherent to curatorial practice's capacity to act. I will attempt to imagine how curatorial practice can transform the economic, political, and ethical conditions under which it operates.

The multiple figures that I intend to define and inhabit in this final chapter draw on the desire to demonstrate that curatorial practice cannot fit properly within the limits that have been assigned to it. The most challenging forms of curatorial practice — some of which I have already referred to, and others to be described in this chapter — bear witness to the slippery relationship the figure of the curator entertains with history, with knowledge, with narrative, and with identification. Through the concept of fabulation I intend neither to criticize a few curators for their relative success as powerful figures in the art world nor to dismiss curators' claim for authorship, but I do have the desire to discuss the concept of authorship from the perspective of multiple forms of curatorial enunciation: exploring various relations between artistic and curatorial practice and arguing that the gap between them is in constant negotiation; engaging with paradoxical concepts of possession and dispossession, anthropophagy and plasticity in order to provide alternative terms to inform notions of

sovereignty and property; and therefore, envision a renewed path for the production of subjectivity in the context of curatorial practice.

Section III.1 — Curatorial practice's paradoxical inhabitation of authorship

When facing the concept of authorship in the context of curatorial practice, the question arises: what is the figure of the curator the author of? I intend to expose some crucial difficulties when it comes to defining the discursive production inherent to curatorial practice in the context of contemporary art. The complexity is a consequence of the multiplicity of tasks that have fallen under the responsibility of the curator over time, which involves organizational and managerial tasks — whose scale and variety often depends on the nature and scale of the institution, as well as on the professional status of the individual — the conception of a project defined as scientific, artistic, or cultural,²⁴⁵ the selection of existing works for an exhibition or a collection, the commissioning of works, the distribution of works in space through the hanging of an exhibition or collection display, the writing of texts, and the production of public speeches or lectures. As I discussed in the first chapter, the existence of this multiplicity of tasks and the changing emphasis on certain tasks in defining the identity of curatorial practice has produced other forms of classification and hierarchies, some of which are clearly visible when one considers the internal organization of the institution (job titles, salary scales, etc.), yet other forms of hierarchies are less transparent but remain active in the broader context of the art world on national and international levels (independent curators versus curators working in institutions; curators operating on local, national, or international scales; curators actively present in specialized press and those who are not; curators working in private or public institutions, etc.). The broad field of action of the curator reveals a practice that produces language-based work (various kinds of texts, speeches, lectures) as well as forms of work that are not language-based but anchored in a different materiality: visual, sometimes musical, both of which is dependent on the work of the artists; gestures and actions that are by definition ephemeral but also only visible to a limited number of people and rarely documented. Usually, the claim of authorship takes its grounds in only two main dimensions of these curatorial tasks: on the one hand, curators claim authorship over the writing of texts that have a critical, interpretative or scientific ambition; on the other hand, a claim of authorship has gradually emerged in relation to the exhibition itself, raising more complex questions in regards to the status of the exhibition; which more clearly bring us

²⁴⁵ This choice of terms often depends on how the institution defines its own institutional project; and within one institution, such as Tate Modern, these different terms might specifically apply to distinguish between the different constituencies and activities at work within its walls.

back to the question of how does one circumscribe the authorship over the exhibition,²⁴⁶ and in which conditions can a curator claim this form of authorship?²⁴⁷ It also raises another question: in what contexts may curators find the need to claim authorship over their work?

The claim of authorship in curatorial practice demonstrates the importance for curators to promote an individual craft and a unique expertise, whether they operate in the context of a unique institution or across a multiplicity of institutional contexts. Authorship single themselves out and legitimizes an authority over a field of research as well as over a group of persons who will be put to work in the service of a curatorial project. Claire Lahuerta goes back to the etymology of the words in the French language of *commissaire* and *curateur* to reflect on two very different conceptions of the curatorial function, emphasizing an ambivalence that continues to inhabit curatorial practice.²⁴⁸ The word *commissaire*²⁴⁹ — in French, the curator is a *commissaire d'exposition* — designates the person in charge of the organization of an event. It explicitly characterizes a position of authority as we are reminded that the term is also used in the context of police forces (*commissaire de police*), military forces (*commissaire des armées*) or the economy (*commissaire aux comptes*). In all those cases, such a *commissaire* is responsible for a general administration and is recognised as an expert whose decisional power extends to many domains of action (financial, legal, economic, logistical ...). However, the etymology of the word *curateur* — which seems closer to the

²⁴⁶ Eric Troncy, currently one of the directors of art centre le Consortium in Dijon, is known for a series of exhibitions he curated in the 1990s and the early 2000s in the context of which he designated the curatorial work as a specific, non-thematic, distribution of works by different artists in space. Troncy used the English term of 'display' to define this unique form of curatorial work. Recently asked in the context of a symposium on contemporary exhibition scenography to discuss his approach of authorship in curatorial practice, he stated: 'what exhibition does not have an author? How can we even think this, if not perhaps through the absurd angle of a spontaneous exhibition, like we might envision spontaneous combustion in fantastic movies?' However, Troncy further stresses that such formal groupings of works, such displays, increasingly appear as banal, devoid of relevance, making the authorial claim behind them insignificant. (Eric Troncy, 'La Trilogie Clinique. Accrocher, Combiner, Décider', in 'Scénographie d'auteur', *Pavillon*, revue de scénographie/scénologie n°2 (April 2009): 34 (Translation is mine).

²⁴⁷ In France, previous legal precedents have determined that indeed a curator can claim authorship over an exhibition or over the conception of a museum on the basis of an arrangement of works that is both 'precise and original'. In the legal decision granting copyright to the 'Musée du Cinema' of Henri Langlois, the motivations put forward to demonstrate the originality and precision of Langlois's arrangement of works, refer to material elements (architectural features of the exhibition, approach of the scenography) as well as discursive ones (imagination, knowledge of the history of cinema, originality of his critical approach). However the attribution of such a status of author appears as an exception: in France, curators of exhibitions do not have the status of authors granted by the *Agessa*, which is in charge of the protection of the work of authors of texts, translators or photographers for example, or by *la Maison des artistes*, which is in charge of authors of visual and plastic works.

²⁴⁸ Claire Lahuerta, 'La scénographie plasticienne en question : l'art du conditionnement', *Marges* [online] (December 2011).

²⁴⁹ The etymology of the word *commissaire* is the Latin word *commissarius*, which designates the clerk, the person committed to an administrative function, in charge of a specific inquiry.

English word ‘curator’ — refers to a responsibility of care — in Latin the verb *curare* and the noun *curator* refer to the act of overseeing, managing, or guarding — more precisely caring for someone in his or her place. In this situation, responsibility is taken in someone else’s name, anchoring authority in a radically different context, one of help and support for someone who might be temporarily or permanently unable to care for him or herself. If we consider the traditional functions of the *commissaire* or the *curateur*, we understand that the authority inherent to their distinct functions has had no connection to authorship. However, I would argue that one could see how the tasks that fall under the function of the curator imply that curatorial practice may encompass both functions — though neither systematically nor simultaneously. In this chapter, I will continue to question the problematic pairing of authority and authorship in the context of curatorial practice, and undo the restriction of the concept of authorship to its neo-liberal instrumentalization.

The questions that have animated this project aim at examining the artistic, political, economic, and ethical foundations of curatorial practice. Considering curatorial practice as the site of a multiplicity of discursive practices through the writing of Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari will allow me to specifically conceive of these practices as sites of production of subjectivity. I will attempt to define the mode of action carried out by curatorial practice through the concept of enunciation, working through the writing of Hannah Arendt, Sarah Pierce, and Michel de Certeau. Through my reading of Certeau, I will also attempt to demonstrate the necessity for a claim of authorship to be anchored in a reflection on the ethics of curatorial practice, considering the position of the curator in a broader distribution of roles and responsibilities leads us to examine the qualities and the values associated with the work of the curator and with the work of the artist, and therefore rethink the nature of the relationship between artistic and curatorial practice in regards to authorship, and, more importantly, through the possibility of withdrawing such a claim. I will also consider how curatorial practice as a discursive practice can be the site of political resistance, challenging the distribution of forces through which individuals are subjected to disciplined modes of thinking and doing. Through my reading of Suely Rolnik and Catherine Malabou, I will therefore try to envisage how curatorial practice can withstand different forms of speculation and instrumentalization in the context of the economic, political, and cultural institutions in which it operates, and in turn, transform the dominant modes of the production of subjectivity. In my project, I intend to explore and challenge the equivalence of authorship and subjectivity that appears at the core of curatorial practice today. Working in proximity to

the ambiguity at the heart of the concept of authorship, I will try to avoid simply dismissing it on the basis of its crystallisation of neo-liberal values and rather make the effort to work through theoretical propositions and examples of curatorial work to show authorship as a paradoxical concept. I will try to work in the density of the gap between authorship and subjectivity.

Section III.1.1 — ‘I speak’: Discursivity and fabulation

Identifying the emergence of new discursive practices, Michel Foucault emphasized the proliferation of multiple subjective positions in the practice of writing, in contrast with the traditional unity and stable identity of the author. According to the Oxford dictionary, ‘discursive’ is first applied to the act of ‘digressing from subject to subject’, describing a style of speech or writing qualified as ‘fluent and expansive’.²⁵⁰ The discursive is also understood as having relation ‘to discourse or modes of discourse’, and most importantly, in traditional philosophical terms, it qualifies ‘an archaic proceeding by argument or reasoning rather than by intuition’. In the context of contemporary research in the broad field of human sciences and artistic practices, the term discursive has been defined as a tool to qualify the specific nature of a work that is concerned with the entanglement of different registers of discourse, systems of language and multiple points of view, and positively encompasses the proliferation of possible meanings and readings. According to Foucault, at the end of the nineteenth century and at the beginning of the twentieth, language became an object of knowledge in itself; not only constitutive of discourse, it became an object of discourse as well. Language thus proved to deploy an enigmatic density rather than to offer an immediate transparency between itself and what it represents. This lack of immediacy and transparency is at the heart of what, with Foucault, we can define as discursivity. Furthermore, the epistemological transformation of the term revealed by Foucault connects the recognition of the density inherent to language with the apparition of literature as ‘the isolation of a particular language whose peculiar mode of being is ‘literary’.²⁵¹

Foucault goes on to write:

Literature becomes progressively more differentiated from the discourse of ideas, and encloses itself within a radical intransitivity; it becomes detached from all the values that were able to keep it in general circulation during the Classical age (taste, pleasure, naturalness, truth), and creates within its own space everything that will ensure a ludic denial of them (the scandalous, the ugly, the impossible); it breaks with the whole definition of *genres* as forms adapted to an order of representations, and becomes merely a manifestation of a language which has no other law than that of affirming – in opposition to all other forms of discourse – its own precipitous existence.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Oxford Dictionaries Online.

²⁵¹ Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 326.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 327.

In Foucault's concept of discursivity there is a distancing from representation and the assertion of language as an act of spatialization and having a direct connection to matter. In his preface to *The Order of Things*, Foucault introduces a text attributed to the writer Jorge Luis Borges, which claims to quote a certain 'Chinese encyclopedia'. Foucault affirms that Borges brings together in one spatial configuration — an inventory in the space of his text — things that cannot share a common place. This arrangement is characterized by Foucault as belonging to the dimension of 'the heteroclite',²⁵³ which is a dimension 'without law or geometry'. This organization that does not respond to any laws disrupts the traditional role of language as a 'table of operations',²⁵⁴ ordering words in order to allow discourse to operate. This concept of language as an ordering apparatus is forever disrupted by the emergence of a multiplicity of possible orders of discourse, contesting the rules of grammar, undoing the coherence of identities and representations — images and words no longer share a common space; allowing words to produce something else, which is not a new order but demonstrates the impossibility of any new founding order.

Foucault's concept of discursive practice no longer considers language — and more specifically the rules of grammar, or the discourse of linguistics — as a central focus. Discursive practices are constituted through the combination of heterogeneous elements, bringing together the visible as well as the articulable, the verbal and the visual, words and things. Foucault does not refer to curatorial practice. Through the fundamental operation of distancing of language from the rules of grammar and by emphasizing the essential combination of visibilities as well as statements in the constitution of a discursive system, he nevertheless offers us a means to refuse the distinction between verbal and visual elements, between the work of the mind (usually defined through terms such as concept, creativity, originality, knowledge, or expertise) and physical action within curatorial practice.

In his text titled *Maurice Blanchot: The Thought of the Outside*, Foucault opposes two registers of language: on the one hand, language as 'communication of meaning': and on the other hand, a 'raw state of language', 'language getting as far away of itself as possible', or language 'setting outside of itself'. He thus confronts the way new literary practices make use of language with the way language is conventionally put to the service of discourse.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, xix.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xix.

²⁵⁵ In Foucault's thought, 'discourse' is not applied to the writing or speech of a specific subject but qualifies an ensemble of repeatable sequences of signs that are collectively recognised as statements constituting knowledge in a particular field. The term 'discourse' designates a language entirely dominated by the will to formalize acts of speech and writing and prevent language from freeing itself from its traditional social and political functions.

Contrary to a discursive formation, such a practice of literature ‘unveils [language’s] own being, the sudden clarity reveals not a folding back but a gap, not a turning back of signs upon themselves but a dispersion’.²⁵⁶ Notions of gap and dispersion emphasize the idea of space within literature, a spatiality that Foucault brings up again when distinguishing between the ‘I think’ from the ‘I speak’, which run counter to each other. He says, “I think” led to the indubitable certainty of the ‘I’ and its existence; “I speak”, on the other hand, distances, disperses, effaces that existence and lets only its empty emplacement appear’.²⁵⁷

Gilles Deleuze similarly puts into question the certainty inherent to the ‘I think’, which for him is the basis upon which the whole of Western philosophy rests. Deleuze writes:

Everybody knows, in a pre-philosophical and pre-conceptual manner... everybody knows what it means to think and to be. ... As a result, when the philosopher says ‘I think therefore I am’, he can assume that the universality of his premises — namely, what it means to be and to think ... will be implicitly understood, and that no one can deny that to doubt is to think, and to think is to be. ... Everybody knows, no one can deny, is the form of representation and the discourse of the representative.²⁵⁸

Deleuze thus argues that philosophers’ certainty that the existence of thought is immediate and transparent produces ‘an Image of Thought’, that is a representation on which philosophy can no longer rest without cancelling the very possibility of thought. Deleuze further writes:

Thought is primarily trespass and violence, the enemy, and nothing presupposes philosophy: everything begins with misosophy. Do not count upon thought to ensure the relative necessity of what it thinks. Rather, count upon the contingency of an encounter with that which forces thought to raise up and educate the absolute necessity of an act of thought or a passion to think. The conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself.²⁵⁹

The encounter that Deleuze describes as a violent disruption runs parallel to Foucault’s description of new discursive practices as a fundamental inadequacy and disordering: the impossibility to think ‘that’. We can trace in the work of Deleuze, and in the work he pursued

Foucault’s conception of discursivity therefore appears to provide a confronting and disruptive position in regards to the normative rules of formation of discourses.

²⁵⁶ Michel Foucault, ‘Maurice Blanchot : The Thought of the Outside’, in *Foucault/Blanchot* (New York : Zone Books, 1987) 11–12.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.

²⁵⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 130.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

with Felix Guattari, a set of concepts that unfold the possibilities for thought departing from this violent interruption: stutter, style, and fabulation are concepts forged in their work that extend on Foucault's work claiming discursive practices as sites of resistance to subjection and enslavement.²⁶⁰

In the co-authored essay 'What is philosophy?', Deleuze and Guattari borrow the concept of fabulation from the work of Henri Bergson, for whom the 'fabulating function' is what allows human beings, individually, or collectively organized, to create gods, and invent religions or fictitious representations.²⁶¹ Bergson's fabulating function plays a key role in helping people to accept social obligations and suggests that equilibrium emerges when the need for a rational organization of human activities meets the irrationality also inherent to human behaviour. Bergson thus demonstrates that fabulation and religion function together as fundamental means of reinforcing social cohesion in societies.

Departing from the visionary faculty of fabulation as described by Bergson, Deleuze and Guattari transform the political function of fabulation. They turn Bergson's fabulating function on its head, transforming its function of subjection into a disrupting function, and challenging its methods that produce disciplined individual and collective subjects. While Bergson looked for equilibrium between rationality and irrationality in social organization, Deleuze and Guattari envisage fabulation as a site of resistance to the hegemony of rationalization, which has taken on new forms in the context of post-capitalist societies through machinic enslavement, which designates a form of subjection that no longer refers to traditional forms of authority but is rather impersonal and automated through the functioning of market flows. In Deleuze and Guattari's philosophical vision, fabulation embodies a form of autonomy that is not the autonomy of the work of art as such, but the autonomy of the sensation, which they defined as a composite (or monument) of affect, perception, and becoming. Through fabulation, the work of art is independent of the emotions and perceptions of his or her maker and their memories. They write:

Creative fabulation has nothing to do with a memory, however exaggerated, or with a fantasy. In fact, the artist, including the novelist, goes beyond the perceptual states and affective transitions of the lived. The artist is a seer, a becomer. How would he recount

²⁶⁰ Maurizio Lazzarato, departing from his reading of Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, makes a distinction between concepts of 'subjection' and of 'enslavement'. He writes: 'Subjection operates at the molar level of the individual (its social dimension, the roles, functions, representations and affections). Enslavement on the other hand operates at the molecular (or pre-individual or infrasocial) level (affects, sensations, desires, those relationships not yet individuated or assigned to a subject).' (Maurizio Lazzarato, *The Machine*, Last accessed 30 September 2014. URL: <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1106/lazzarato/en>)

²⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, *What is philosophy ?* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1994).

what happened to him, or what he imagines, since he is a shadow? He has seen something in life that is too great, too unbearable also, and the mutual embrace of life with what threatens it, so that the corner of nature or districts of the town that he sees, along with their characters, accede to a vision that, through them, composes the percepts or that life, of that moment, shattering lived perceptions into a sort of cubism, a sort of simultaneism, of harsh or crepuscular light, or purple or blue, which have no other object or subject than themselves. ‘What we call styles,’ said Giacometti, ‘are those visions fixed in time and space’.²⁶²

The concept of fabulation comes close to another fundamental concept put forward by Deleuze and Guattari: style. Through both style and fabulation, Deleuze and Guattari take their distance with a language-centred perspective proper to a Western philosophical tradition in order to replace language ‘with a wider range of semiotics, visual or musical’. In taking this approach, it is therefore central for Deleuze and Guattari to think about the work of philosophy, and of art and literature as parallel critical trajectories. They write:

Art undoes the triple organization of perceptions, affections, and opinions in order to substitute a monument composed of percepts, affects, and blocs of sensations that take the place of language. The writer uses words, but by creating a syntax that makes them pass into sensation that makes the standard language stammer, tremble, cry, or even sing: this is the style, the ‘tone,’ the language of sensations, or the foreign language within language that summons forth a people to come, ‘Oh, people of old Catawba,’ ‘Oh, people of Yoknapatawpha.’ The writer twists language, makes it vibrate, seizes hold of it, and rends it in order to wrest the percept from perceptions, the affect from affections, the sensation from opinion-in view, one hopes, of that still-missing people.²⁶³

Deleuze and Guattari push to the limits a set of fundamental concepts that are traditionally bound to individuality, subjectivity, and authorship in order to completely contradict their usual definitions by integrating at their core instability and heterogeneity that propel us to reinvent these concepts anew.²⁶⁴ Style and fabulation belong to this ensemble of concepts that allow Deleuze and Guattari to inscribe a philosophy of language politically. Similarly, the

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 171.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 176.

²⁶⁴ ‘That is what style is, or rather, the absence of style asymptotic, agrammatical: the moment when language is no longer defined by what it says, even by what makes it a signifying thing, but by what causes it to move, to flow and to explode desire. For literature is like schizophrenia: a process, and not a goal, a production and not an expression. (Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 133).

concepts of style and of fabulation are moved away from their common use. Both concepts are invested politically and affirmed as powerful theoretical tools in the context of a critique of habitual conceptions of individuality, subjectivity and authorship. Philosopher Jean-Jacques Lecercle outlines the paradox characteristic of Deleuze's concept of style. He writes:

It can be perceived as the most individual inhabitation of language, to use Heidegger's metaphor, and yet not be ascribed to a person: there is a subject of style, but this subject is the end-product of a process of subjectivation (thus, the subject is not the origin, but the effect of her style: the author does not have style, it is style that has an author, that is inscribed, and in a way embodied, in an author's name), and this subject, both individual (an 'inimitable' style) and collective (an assemblage is speaking) is in no way reducible to a person not even Foucault, charming as he was, was one, at least in Deleuze's portrait of him: 'if there is a subject, it is a subject without identity'.²⁶⁵

For this subject without identity, fabulation or 'acts of fabulation' — as Deleuze initially put forward in his work on cinema — appear as forms of expression that do not privilege acts of speech over visual or musical acts of enunciation. Moreover, these acts of fabulation blur the distinction between different positions of enunciation: Deleuze gives the example of the superposition between the narrator and the character in literature; yet more importantly, he suggests the erasure of the difference between individual and collective statements. He writes:

The author makes a step toward his characters, but the characters make a step toward the author: double becoming. Fabulation is neither an impersonal myth, nor a personal fiction: it is an acting speech, an act of speech through which the character ceaselessly cross the frontier that separated his private affair from politics, and himself produces collective statements.²⁶⁶

For Deleuze, fabulation constitutes for the artist, or the writer, a political approach to history: the artist or writer is a subject without identity that seizes history in order to make it spell out a new social collectivity moving beyond existing identities — 'all fabulation is the fabrication of giants'²⁶⁷. Deleuze writes:

The ultimate aim of literature is to release this creation of a health or this invention of a people — that is, a possibility of life — in the delirium.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁵ Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *Deleuze and Language* (London : Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 223-224. Lecercle refers to Deleuze, in Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations 1972-1990* (New York : Columbia University Press, 1995), 115.

²⁶⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2. Time-Image* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1997) 222.

²⁶⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is philosophy ?*, 171.

²⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, 'Literature and Life', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol 23, No 2 (Winter 1997): 229. Last accessed 3 August 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1343982>

Section III.1.2 — A proliferation of forms of (curatorial) enunciation

Through Foucault's analysis of new discursive practices and Deleuze's concept of fabulation, the concept of enunciation detaches itself from the concepts of statement, rule, and knowledge.²⁶⁹ I would therefore argue that it is crucial to consider the act of enunciating in and for itself, before and aside from any possible signification of the statement. Enunciation rather anchors itself in action and speech, of which Hannah Arendt emphasized the qualities of boundlessness and unpredictability.²⁷⁰ Further reflecting on the act of enunciation in light of Arendt's theory of action, it is relevant to stress that the different etymology of the verb 'to act' point towards a fundamental ambivalence. Arendt writes:

To the two Greek verbs *archein* ('to begin', 'to lead', finally 'to rule') and *prattein* ('to pass through', 'to achieve', 'to finish') correspond the two Latin verbs *agere* ('to set in motion', 'to lead') and *gerere* (whose original meaning is 'to bear'). Here it seems as though each action were divided in two parts, the beginning made by a single person and the achievement in which many join by 'bearing' and 'finishing' the enterprise, by seeing it through.²⁷¹

Arendt suggests that from this inherent ambivalence of action, two distinct functions have derived: one that consists in giving command, ruling alone; another that consists in executing, following orders. Arendt adds, 'the ruler monopolizes, so to speak, the strength of those without whose help he would never be able to achieve anything'.²⁷² However for Arendt, the belief that one can rule alone is a delusion, as for her 'the actor always moves among and in relation to other acting beings, he is never merely a "doer" but always at the same time a sufferer', thus making collapse the distinction between activity and passivity, command and execution. Enunciation is the act through which a public space is produced, as it cannot exist in isolation but addresses one and many others.

²⁶⁹ The term of enunciation customarily describes a situation of communication, of which one can specify the modalities — who, when and where. It is therefore traditionally tied to language-centred forms of communication, although in the context of this research on curatorial practice, I will argue for the consideration of enunciation in the expanded discursive framework previously defined.

²⁷⁰ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, second edition (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 190 – 191.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 189.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 190.

We venture to put our words and deeds into the world in recognition that someone else will take them up — misuse and reuse them, changing what I have done into something plural — and this unpredictable quality of action is also its community.²⁷³

Sarah Pierce's approach to the curatorial emphasizes its crucial role in the act of beginning, getting discourse underway, producing a public space of enunciation that fundamentally engages the question of how knowledge is produced instead of claiming the production of knowledge as such.²⁷⁴ Her approach could be determined as fabulation. As a form of enunciation encompassing both action and speech, fabulation constitutes a process rather than an end in itself. I would further argue that fabulation is a process whose ending is ceaselessly delayed, never arriving, but on the contrary always beginning. Pierce similarly describes the curatorial as a beginning, a 'rise-up'. She writes, 'A beginning then, rather than presenting an origin, is a point where something is taken up'.²⁷⁵ She further positions the beginning of her own attempt at defining the curatorial in 'the middle': 'We are in the middle of the curatorial. This is where I'd like to begin'.²⁷⁶ The middle appears here as a metaphor for the position available for curatorial practice whose enunciation, as soon as it begins, as soon as it encounters a work of art, is caught in the web of infinite relations: born of the impossibility for the verbal and the visual to overlap, born of the infinite spectrum of viewers. As a metaphor, Pierce's 'middle' implicitly recall Deleuze and Guattari's concept of 'milieu', and their unsettling of structuring concepts such as identity or chronology, which are founded on linear approaches based on known cycles or regular progression.²⁷⁷ On the contrary, the middle offers neither a clear point of departure nor a point of arriving, and describes curatorial practice as an emplacement with no fixed anchorage, as a dispositif in constant state of metamorphosis.

²⁷³ Sarah Pierce, 'A Simple Operator', *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating*, Chapter 11, page 15, Kindle edition for mac

²⁷⁴ Sarah Pierce is an artist who has used, since 2003, the term 'The Metropolitan Complex' to designate her project. She claims that her practice 'demonstrates her broad understanding of cultural work' (Pierce's website: www.themetropolitancomplex.com) She has indeed been working across different registers of action and production, including teaching, exhibition-making, writing, and researching in various cultural contexts, including academia. Her specific interests have led her to study historical forms of gathering, as well as generate new ones through her practice.

²⁷⁵ Pierce, 'A Simple Operator', Chapter 11, page 5, Kindle edition for mac

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, Chapter 11, page 5, Kindle edition for mac

²⁷⁷ In his note about the translation of the French word 'milieu' used by Deleuze and Guattari, Brian Massumi acknowledges the polysemy of such a term, which he kept as such in English. Massumi writes: 'In French, *milieu* means "surroundings," "medium" (as in chemistry), and "middle." In the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, "milieu" should be read as a technical term combining all three meanings'. (Gilles Deleuze, Felix, Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1987), xvii).

In the practice of curator Raimundas Malašauskas, such concepts of metamorphosis and of absence of origin, or destination, appears crucial. In the press release announcing the opening of the exhibition for both the Cypriot and Lithuanian pavilions at the Venice Biennial 2015, titled *Oo*²⁷⁸, [Fig 23 – 24] one can read: ‘An exhibition curated from its middle starts as a dream’. The text continues, following a long, almost never-ending cataloguing of thoughts:

Or with 5 artists walking into the Internet (one of them meets living sculptures on the streets of Venice), runs the test of childhood or writes a new obituary for a long-time dead illusionist, steps into TV gymnastics or moves along the lines of furniture and cinema, flashes with dog’s eyes or lights up neon in Maya, brings a motorcycle closer to modernist architecture or freezes, stays frozen or triggers electric currents, shoots for the last time or wonders like a star on a screen-saver, turns into a cross-sequence of walls or flips even and odd pages at once, walks the passage between two people in different cities or tunes the building to a heartbeat, plays an algorithm for the future or sinks into an orchestra pit, (sings back or asks the reader), sounds like a palace in someone’s mouth or joins the book of future children, tastes of the beginning and end simultaneously.²⁷⁹

The text recalls the infamous Borgesian Chinese Encyclopaedia brought forward by Foucault. Through this implicit reference, Malašauskas, who occupied the function of curator of this joint pavilion in the context of the 55th Venice Biennale, hinged the curatorial project of *Oo* on multiple acts of enunciation rather than a single narrative, and explicitly positioned the curatorial act not at a point of origin but rather situated in the middle.

Oo took place in a Venetian modernist building, the Palasport Giobatta Gianquinto, a site ordinarily used for the practice of different sport activities. In his press release, Malašauskas explicitly exposed his desire for the exhibition to inhabit this building in close relation with its habitual activities (such as children games and sport competitions); the exhibition ‘takes place in a building that has its own rhythm, character and schedule: the favourite venue of physical exercise in Venice. It will be witnessing a simultaneous co-habitation of art and sports for the entire summer’. The notion of cohabitation found an explicit echo in the arbitrary pairing of two distinct countries, Lithuania and Cyprus — who coincidentally both invited Malašauskas to curate their pavilion for the biennale — while implicitly approaching the relationship between art and sport from a political perspective in the form of an ‘exercise’ — ‘of

²⁷⁸ The title of the exhibition can indifferently be spelled as *Oo*, *oO*, *OO* or *oo*.

²⁷⁹ The press release of the exhibition can be accessed through the press information available on the exhibition website: <https://drive.google.com/folderview?id=0B4qRx4s11eJ6djZwUW5MSEF1czA&usp=sharing>.

cosmopolitanism'.²⁸⁰ The title of the exhibition *Oo* — or *oO*, or *oo* — as a combination of signs reflected on multiple forms of organization and emphasized the need to have at least two elements to constitute an organization; a situation not of equality, or symmetry, and whose relations are constantly changing. I would argue that in this sense *Oo* attempted to simultaneously embody the organization of the exhibition — in its generic dimension, of any exhibition — as well as the specific situation of this exhibition, exploring the field of possibilities in combining two national pavilions, and two different types of organization, a sport facility, and an art event.

Oo multiplied the forms, spaces, and temporalities of enunciation. The exhibition split itself across two physical spaces: the Palasport itself as well as the video preview of the exhibition in the form of an online book.²⁸¹ In the context of the Palasport, the exhibition appeared as a constantly transforming entity, adjusting its material elements in relation to the activities, artistic or otherwise, taking place within its walls. The spectator of the exhibition was somehow lost in the immensity of the building, and the works of the artists — including ephemeral events and performances that took place at specific moments throughout the duration of the exhibition — did not compete with the building but rather unfolded within it. The image of the fold is also present in the video preview, which consists of a book whose pages are turned by multiple pair of hands to reveal a complex distribution of pages, opening inward and outward, presenting different combinations, playing with symmetry and asymmetry, repetitions and doublings. The hypnotic voice-over accompanying the turning of the pages — performed by hypnotist Marcos Luytens, who previously collaborated with Malašauskas on the 'Hypnotic Show'²⁸² — further echoes the exhibition's experience of losing oneself in space and time, and attempts to induce an altered state of consciousness in the viewer of the video.

Certain works in the exhibition mirrored the idea of the labyrinth, forcing spectators to abandon some control under the guidance of the artist, or performer, such as in the work of artist Myriam Lefkowitz. *Walk, hands, eyes (Venice, 2013)*. [Fig 25] It consisted of taking

²⁸⁰ Malašauskas describes the opportunity and task to make a unique exhibition that would nevertheless represent two countries, Cyprus and Lithuania, as an exercise of cosmopolitanism, therefore imagining a form of exhibition that could be a place open to all cultures, detached from national political ideologies.

²⁸¹ This video is available on <http://oo-oo.co/oo-a-preview/>

²⁸² 'The Hypnotic Show' is a project curated by Raimundas Malašauskas in close collaboration with hypnotist Marcos Luytens. It consists on the idea that the exhibition takes place within the brain of individual spectators on the basis of works based on scripts and ideas proposed by artists and communicated to the audience through the voice and hypnotic techniques of Luytens. In the interview he performed about the project, Malašauskas states that the hypnotic show is 'a temporary social structure engaging into creative cognitive acts through shared practices of art and hypnosis', and further adds that 'the relationship between hypnotist and the audience should be described as collaboration'. (Source: <http://www.rye.tw/HYPNOFAQandSCRIPTS.pdf>).

individual visitors on a walk across the building and its neighbouring streets, with the request to the visitor to keep their eyes closed. Lefkowitz, or one of the performers she trained to replace her, guided the spectator's body almost solely through touch; constantly adjusting the manner of their approach depending on the situation. Sometimes they only touched the tips of the person's fingers, other times they gently pressed the person's back, and sometimes they put their whole arm around the person's waist. At specific moments, the artist or performer took hold of the spectator's head and asked them to open their eyes for a very short amount of time — perhaps a couple of seconds — as though isolating single images like photographs. Such a walk in the dark produced an enhanced embodied experience of sound, smell, touch, and vision that shared some similarities with the cinema experience; although Lefkowitz's work explored urban space in a way that cinema cannot. The immersive quality of *Walk, hands, eyes* anchors the experience of the work in a relationship between two human beings and requires that the spectator relinquishes some control, let go of the conventional distances that separate his or her body from the body of others, and accept a form of passivity on which the work depends.

Through these explicit forms of fragmentation of the exhibition experience, whose outcome is deliberately postponed by keeping the video online, curatorial practice demonstrates its refusal to be an end point as much as it negates the possibility of uniqueness and origin. In *Oo*, Malašauskas could be compared to a dreamer who cannot keep control over the events occurring in his dream; as if *Oo* was an organism, alive and self-organised, giving the artists as much space and freedom to act as possible. In addition, in *Oo*, Malašauskas challenges the positions of knowledge and leadership that the figure of the curator habitually occupies. The relationship of the exhibition to the production of knowledge is one of ambiguous fictionalization inscribed by the timeline of the exhibition that went from the exhibition's present right back to 1972, referring to a sequence of events big and small and ranging from Cypriot and Lithuanian national politics to Venetian local news.²⁸³ In the press release, Malašauskas describes the organizational form of the exhibition as floating and compared it to the experience of life and to plankton. The video preview in staging multiple pair of hands points to an idea of collective statement and refuses any sense of identification through the absence of an identifiable face or name. I would argue that there is a form of disidentification with the figure of the curator that becomes explicit in Malašauskas's curatorial practice, and this is fundamental to the production of fabulation: It works as if Malašauskas intended to

²⁸³ The timeline can be accessed on <http://oo-oo.co/timeline/>

produce a fictional matrix through which he could orchestrate a multiplicity of spaces of enunciation and distribute roles and responsibilities across many different actors — artists, collaborators — in order to detach himself from a position of authority that the institution such as the Venice Biennial demanded him to fulfil.

Another telling example of Malašauskas's mode of operating was made visible in the exhibition 'Done: Exploring fatal Holography', shown at the gallery Tulips and Roses in Brussels in 2011.²⁸⁴ [Fig 26 – 27] The exhibition threw the visitor in a state of wonder: what are we looking at? Was it a collection of objects? Were they works of art in the traditional sense of the term? Why was the curator named as the author of some of the works displayed? One of the gallery owners, Jonas, warmly welcomed me into the space and started talking about the notion of hologram, taking me through the different objects constituting the exhibition, which Jennifer Teets in her review of the exhibition described in detail:

Four hologram²⁸⁵ portraits of two Lithuanian twins with the surname Praspaliauskas, artist Darius Miksys, and a group portrait showing Raimundas, Miksys and the twins suspended in an empty painting frame ... a carpet and various objects resting on top of it. ... Another framed portrait ... by photographer Alexandre Guirkingier, though this time it's an advertising photograph from a Hermès bag campaign, and since it's rotated it appears surreal ... Another portrait hangs on the wall: a copy of a famous Lithuanian painting titled *The Sitting Woman* — flipping the painting you realize it's double-sided and was made in the context of Italian artist Alex Cecchetti's *Salon du Mercredi* (a private thematic night event in Paris during which unusual topics are revealed and explored by artists and friends) and painted by Roman Sein.²⁸⁶

The persona of the curator, Raimundas Malašauskas, was overtly present, and yet the exhibition portrayed this figure with disorientating ambiguity. There was an obvious ambivalence between the function of the curator and the function of the artist: in the context of this exhibition, they appeared to blend into each other without any sign or statement accounting for this form of merger. The exhibition, as Malašauskas emphasized, attempted to

²⁸⁴ It is important to note that the exhibitions curated by Raimundas Malašauskas that I refer to in this thesis took place in spaces of different scales and in different institutional contexts. Tulips and Roses operated in the framework of a commercial gallery, in Vilnius, and then in Brussels, until 2013.

<http://www.tulipsandroses.lt/index.php?/exhibitions/done/2/>

²⁸⁵ In fact, the exhibition did not display any hologram in the proper sense of the term — which emerged in the 1960s —, the portraits were made through a form of 3D photography produced in Lithuania and, more generally, Malašauskas took the term hologram in a figural, metaphoric sense.

²⁸⁶ Jennifer Teets, 'I am a hologram', *Metropolis M Magazine* n°6 (December/January 2011). Last accessed 7 August 2015. <http://metropolism.com/magazine/2011-no6/i-am-a-hologram/>

create a character ‘using a technology of illusion’,²⁸⁷ a ‘hologramatic character’. The idea of working with the hologram²⁸⁸ came to Malašauskas following a visit of the Museum of Holography at MIT in Boston. The initial idea was to make an exhibition that would picture a unique hologram image, reflecting the desire to conceive of a group exhibition as indivisible and undivided. The idea that the hologram could function as a container, inside which things would be held, appeared as contradictory to the fact that the hologram actually defies the division between inside and outside. Malašauskas thus envisioned how he, as the figure of the curator, could create a character who would act out as a hologram and reflect a complex ensemble of ideas, questions, and material elements brought forward by the artists he had invited to explore the concept of holography with. The exhibition thus did not end with the assembly of curious things placed in the space of Tulips & Roses but found a crucial extension — although it was actually the main point of departure — in a blog that was used by the different contributors to the project.²⁸⁹ This project highlights Malašauskas’s attempt at denying the position of the curator as a position of exteriority. The figure of the curator that Malašauskas embodies in this exhibition does not compete with the position of the artist but rather attempts to collapse both positions into one unique topological figure embodied by the holographic character.

In the book he published in the context of dOCUMENTA (13) for which he was an associate curator, titled *Meeting Dixie Evans: How to Burlesque*,²⁹⁰ Malašauskas fulfils the role of the storyteller to write an ambiguous story of ‘where Dixie Evans meets Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Christodoulos Panayiotou, Ruth Robbins, Hélène Vanel, Jessica Warboys and countless other burlesque stars’. The storyteller distinguishes himself from the figure of the author, and places emphasis on the act of speech and the creation of a space of enunciation in which an inversion takes place: the curator of dOCUMENTA (13), Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who embodies the subject of discourse in the context of the exhibition she curates, appears here as the subject being discoursed, and is the only character in the story who does not directly participate in telling the story. On the contrary, the artists — Robbins, Warboys

²⁸⁷ Transcript of the interview of Raimundas Malašauskas by artist Jesse Ash on resonance FM, available as a pdf file on <http://www.cac.lt/en/exhibitions/past/11/5317>

²⁸⁸ A hologram is ‘a photographic record produced by illuminating the object with coherent light (as from a laser) and, without using lenses, exposing a film to light reflected from this object and to a direct beam of coherent light. When interference patterns on the film are illuminated by the coherent light a three-dimensional image is produced.’ (Source: Collins English Dictionary – Complete and Unabridged © HarperCollins Publishers 1991, 1994, 1998, 2000, 2003).

²⁸⁹ <http://sunvysne.tumblr.com>

²⁹⁰ Raimundas Malašauskas, ‘Meeting Dixie Evans – How to Burlesque’, *Documenta (13): 100 Notes - 100 Thoughts* (Berlin: Hantje Cantz, 2012).

and Panayiotou — join Malašauskas in a shared act of enunciation, which inaugurates the search for a character both ‘invented and non-invented’: Dixie Evans, star of burlesque, known for her parody of Marilyn Monroe in the 1950s. The index of voices at the beginning of the story indicates that Dixie Evans herself takes part in the act of storytelling. Whether or not these ‘voices’ can really be attributed to the people they are supposed to belong to is not important, as indeed, Malašauskas’s approach of writing is not one of truth or total invention but rather an equivocal approach to fiction that challenges the conventional opposition between truth and falsity. Indeed, the uncertainty regarding the roles effectively played by Robbins, Warboys, and Panayiotou in the writing of the story raises the question of the distribution of agency in the context of curatorial practice. Malašauskas deliberately works in the tenuous gap between notions of collaboration and collective authorship and his desire and attempt at speaking through these artists’ voices, seeing through their eyes, letting himself be possessed by their modes of thought — ‘catapulting into another being, character, self, species, unexplored feeling’.²⁹¹ Parody, drag, burlesque, and other many forms of doubling and time travelling constitute the background onto which his curatorial practice is performed. Malašauskas’s practice hinges upon a contestation of authorship that does not take the form of traditional critique — aligned with this research — but rather inhabits the ambiguity inherent to curatorial practice’s claim of authorship.²⁹² Malašauskas playfully moves between the multiple figures of the curator, the author, the dramaturge, the storyteller as well as the artist, ceaselessly undoing the possibility of assigning himself a role, a function, or a place. I do not believe however that he ever contested the name of ‘curator’ as such. Malašauskas undoes the link between curatorial authorship and the definitive formats through which curatorial projects are made manifest. He takes stock of the density of his practice, as a proliferation of figures, modes of operation and forms of thought. From the perspective of his practice, he is a host, the one who receives or is received by others, alternatively giving or taking away; the one who takes care, who disrupts, and who betrays. In his curatorial practice, the figure of the curator withdraws from disciplined identities and professional templates, and makes the demonstration of a fundamental plasticity that instils into the figure of the curator the

²⁹¹ Raimundas Malasauskas, ‘Meeting Dixie Evans – How to Burlesque’, *Documenta (13): 100 Notes - 100 Thoughts*.

²⁹² For the anthology that gathers his critical writings, Malasauskas invited sixteen readers to add, comment on, correct, and leave their mark boldly in the margins, as a way of appropriating his own words. Malasauskas described the book as not belonging to no one, and not needed by anyone. <http://www.sternberg-press.com/index.php?pageId=1365&bookId=260&l=en>

potential of transformation and self-determination on the level of the production of subjectivity.

Section III.2 — The production of a fabulous plastic subjectivity

In the essay titled ‘Mundus est fabula’, Jean-Luc Nancy takes as a starting point René Descartes’s *Discours de la méthode*, and more particularly the startling fact that Descartes describes his philosophical work as a fable. Nancy reminds the reader of the context in which Descartes writes, a context related to the Baroque thought that ‘the world we see and in which we live is no more real than fable, the illusion of which is provided to us by theatre’. Nancy thus introduces the idea that the consequence of thinking the world as a fable is that fiction is not introduced ‘upon truth’ but ‘within it’; there is no longer an opposition between truth and fiction. The fable is usually defined as an exemplary story, not the narrative of an action that once took place but rather a discourse that means to shape behaviour. Nancy argues that Descartes’s fable is in that sense an opposition to all fables; it is a ‘fable of frankness’. Nancy talks about a withdrawal of the model, through which Descartes asserts that ‘the fable’s truth is in its invention, this truth is not merely parallel or homologous to the truth of what it contains (fictive creation). It functions insofar as it invents itself — or invents itself as — the veritable creation, the unfictionable origin of a world in general’.²⁹³ For Nancy, the act of enunciation appears as ‘the point where the fable is inaugurated’ that he describes as ‘the point of fabulation itself’. Enunciation is the moment of invention described as ‘the withdrawn cavity from which a voice is heard, which says, ‘I fabulate’. Therefore Nancy claims that speaking and thinking suppose feigning, and suggests that the fable is withdrawn from fiction as well as from truth. He writes:

Mundus est fabula: the pure I is I who utters myself uttering. A pure and thoughtful fiction indeed, at this height of purity. All at once the subject withdraws. Throughout centuries of subjectivity there will never be any other I than the I withdrawn from his own discourse, and who will recites his fables, saying ‘I am the State’, or ‘Ego, Hugo’, or ‘I am Madame Bovary’, or even ‘Good Lord, why is it that I am I?’²⁹⁴

The affirmation of the ‘I’ is neither the affirmation of the existence of the subject, at least not the unitary and stable subject of the philosophical tradition, nor the affirmation of truth or certainty, but the affirmation of the possibility of speech and of invention through enunciation. Such an approach of speech and of the act of enunciation through the lens of the

²⁹³ Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Mundus Est Fabula’, *MLN*, Vol. 93, No. 4 (May, 1978): 650. Last accessed 4 October 2015. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2906598>

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 653

concept of the fable is central to the work of Michel de Certeau on mystic thought and has played a key role in my own approach to the concept of fabulation.

Section III.2.1 — The allegiance to the fable

It is about a discourse that has the function of a fable. It situates itself on the side of *speech*. The mystic is centred on the practice and theory of ‘dialogue’, be it through prayer or through the spiritual exchange between speaking subjects. Through this first aspect the mystic pertains to the ‘fable’, which is about speaking, such as its etymology indicates (*fari*). It is a science of speech, an interlocution. In principle, it implicates an identity between theory and practice of speech, that is, between discourse and fable. ... In language fable is what is both the act of instituting and of saying the institution of something. Thus a speech that makes speak, that creates, that gives way to language. It is a poetic discourse, of birth, of surprise. It is not authorized by what precedes (a reality that it could express, a demonstration that it would conclude) but by what it makes possible, by what it inaugurates, by its effects.²⁹⁵

The Mystic Fable is the title that Certeau gave to his most fundamental body of research. As the title indicates Certeau intimately connects these two terms. It implies that their epistemological functions complement each other in order to produce a critical approach that is simultaneously a discourse and a practice. In the context of his research on the mystic, Certeau uses the concept of the fable as a way of disrupting an academic approach to discourse, which usually asserts a scientific ambition rather than a literary one. In ambivalently naming ‘fable’ both the corpus of texts produced by mystic thinkers and his own discursive approach to these texts as historian, Certeau moved beyond two important limits: on the one hand, he proposed a unique conceptual framework for his analysis of a complex corpus of texts that had remained at the margins of different disciplines such as theology, literature, and history; on the other hand, he drew a parallel between his own scientific endeavour and the endeavour of the mystics — both religious and literary — proposing to fundamentally re-evaluate the nature of these texts and bring to life a ‘science of speech’. Through the motif of the fable, Certeau pointed to two essential ideas: the orality of the mystic discourse and its relationship to fiction. In his introduction, Certeau defined what he understood as mystic speech, ‘They formed a solidarity with all the tongues that continued speaking, marked in their discourse by the assimilation to the child, the woman, the illiterate, madness, angels, or the body’.²⁹⁶ Here we understand that Certeau also connected the

²⁹⁵ Michel de Certeau, ‘Mystique et psychoanalyse’, in *Michel de Certeau*, ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Cahiers pour un temps, Centre Pompidou, 1987), 183-184 (Translation is mine).

²⁹⁶ Michel de Certeau, *The Mystic Fable*, Volume 1, The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, trans. Michael B. Smith (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 13.

language of the mystics, and by extension the language of the fable; to a number of registers of speech considered at the margins of language, and of sense. Certeau's fable privileges the discursive qualities of speech, asserting that mystic thinking institutes through writing the imperative of saying. Seen in this way, the mystics disrupt the hierarchy through which written texts have come to prevail over and above speech.

Certeau also stressed that in the mystic, the speech act is distinguishable from speech itself.

He writes:

Hence the importance taken on by the instauration of a new locus, that of the I, and by the operations of (spiritual) exchange, of communication hinge upon the question of the subject, and also by all the procedures, rhetorical or poetic, capable of organizing a field of allocution per se. ... What was called 'experience' connoted this field, distinguishing it from already constituted fields of knowledge. At a time when a 'utopian' space, opening up in the margins of a no longer decipherable historical reality, supplied a non-place for a new kind of reason to use its capacity to produce a world as text and make texts themselves generate worlds — a mystic space appeared alongside the various fields of knowledge.²⁹⁷

Over and over again, through his examination of mystic thought, Certeau asserted the introduction of a different paradigm within the field of discourse, which relied on acts of enunciation. For Certeau, enunciation disrupts discourse by shifting the focus from the content of discourse, that is the equation between the formality of language and its signification — signs and sense — towards the inaugural moment of enunciation, of saying and of speaking. Enunciation certifies the existence of speech and thus constitutes a modality of affirmation distinct from any signification, detached from the concern of truth, rationality, and knowledge. Certeau writes, 'To reiterate, the lie is no longer that which, were it to be eliminated, would allow for a system of truth or an order of thought. It is the field in which the effects of utterance will be produced',²⁹⁸ Certeau thus insists on the inaugural dimension of this act, its performative dimension, embodied in the 'I' of the subject speaking. Yet Certeau demonstrates that this act of enunciation is entirely turned towards an other; it does not refer to truth or knowledge but addresses a belief. As historian Jacques Le Brun notes, 'the performative and the "pure" will do not result in restoring a certainty: language itself

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 161.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

becomes, as a whole, possibility of lying, the dependence of the “I” in relation to an “other” institutes doubt and risk’.²⁹⁹

Although I am aware of the specificity of Certeau’s object of research, and more particularly of the substantial distance it has with curatorial practice in terms of discipline and of chronology, I would like to argue that Certeau’s concerns, both epistemological and ethical, are of crucial importance for my attempt to rethink an approach to curatorial practice. From an epistemological perspective, Certeau challenged the pre-eminence of conceptions of discourse that produce stable hierarchies between acts of writing and acts of speech, and more specifically in the context of the mystic, he contested the ideological positions through which mystic speech was defined as irrational and simplistically esoteric, devoid of epistemological value outside of its theological context. In light of curatorial practice, I would argue that we face a set of epistemological concerns, which is different yet finds a pertinent echo in Certeau’s investigation and claims, as the introduction to Malašauskas’s practice emphasized. The primacy of writing — dealt with by Certeau at length in his research — confronts curatorial practices with a crucial problem. Writing, although it has acquired an important role over time through a variety of publishing formats such as art magazines, exhibition catalogues, and artists’ monographs, only partially reflect curatorial practices. In a culture within which authority and authorship are undeniably associated with ‘scriptural culture’, Certeau helps us to question concepts of authority and authorship in the context of curatorial practice. Moreover, Certeau’s object of research forced him to examine the emergence of a set of differentiated practices and ideological positions within the context of the highly-disciplined field of theology. Through his approach to the mystics, Certeau allowed a specific paradigm of dissidence to emerge: a dissidence that does not frontally oppose the main position of power and authority but rather displaces the very concept of authority by challenging concepts of knowledge, truth, and of subjectivity. Considering curatorial practice as another highly institutionalized field, specifically in the context of the museum — which is why Tate Modern has been set as a crucial example in my project — I have found within Certeau’s work a conceptual framework that could supply theoretical tools to describe how various forms of curatorial practice do not operate in opposition to institutions, but rather work at undoing ideological constructions from within, thus disrupting them through the

²⁹⁹ Jacques le Brun, ‘Michel De Certeau, La Fable Mystique. XVIe-XVIIe siècle’, *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, Volume 38, Numéro 6 (1983): 1299. Last accessed 19 February 2015. URL: http://www.persee.fr/doc/ahess_0395-2649_1983_num_38_6_411020_t1_1297_0000_001

emergence of dissenting voices. Finally, Certeau's work is exemplary for its refusal to distinguish practice and discourse, allowing his objects of research work as mirrors for his own practice. In his approach, he continuously inscribed himself in the critical dispositif of his thought; the reinvention of the figure of mystic speech also appears as a reinvention of the work of the historian, producing a body of thought that is political as well as ethical. This self-reflexive approach has been central to my own endeavours, and has provided a crucial criterion in order to examine curatorial practices — of others and of mine — in the context of this project.

Section III.2.2 — Writing oneself in the work of others: Encounter, belief, and cut

In the following section of this chapter, I intend to demonstrate how Certeau's concept of the mystic fable has provided me with a framework through which I could further qualify my claims regarding the necessity to question and expand current models of curatorial practice, focusing on the nature of the relationship between artistic and curatorial practice, the professional template fulfilled by the figure of the curator, and the authorship claimed in this particular context. Through an examination of the relationship between curatorial practice and artistic practice, I intend to consider how the figure of the curator conceives of the impact of his or her practice on the artistic practice that it interacts with. I will not engage here with the specific acts and formats through which curatorial practice relates to artistic practices. I rather aim at questioning a set of ethical and political principles that may more generally guide the figure of the curator in their approach to artistic practices. I wish to consider the general framework of these curatorial methodologies through the concept of 'belief', thus intentionally detaching them from the concept of knowledge as well as expertise that are traditionally associated with curatorial practice within the disciplinary framework of art history or the broader cultural framework that considers curating as an act of selection and mediation. Certeau writes:

I understand by 'belief' not the object of the act of believing (a dogma, a programme, etc.) but the investment of subjects in a proposition, the act of enunciation holding it as true — or to say it differently, a 'modality' of the affirmation rather than its content.³⁰⁰

Through the notion of investment, Certeau emphasizes the particular relationship the mystics had to their object of thinking — an object, which resists definitive articulation in language, as the multiple terms 'God', 'faith', 'the other', and 'alterity' point to. However, in Certeau's approach, the mystics' object mirrors his own object of study, which is the mystic itself. The endeavour of the mystics, who attempted to invent a space and a language in order to speak of their experience and their relationship to this other, thus echoes Certeau's own task as an historian of the mystics. Certeau writes:

At least as it cuts out a form of knowledge that contrasts with the usual form of our knowledges, it designates a type of discourse in principle detached from an ontological or monist a priori — another "gesture of thought" in language.³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ Certeau, *The practice of everyday life*, 178.

³⁰¹ Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*, t.II, 46.

The mystic and the historian — and by extension, I claim, the curator — inhabit the object of study that he or she has cut out from the real. Such an operation of cutting out an object of research, as well as the affirmation that this act is founded on belief rather than knowledge, and on the imperative of saying — which may assume lying rather than establishing truth — positions the function of the historian at a distance from their traditional role. My hypothesis is that the function of the historian as put forward by Certeau, which mirrors the mode of speech developed by the mystics, offer a relevant model for curatorial practice. It is fundamental to emphasize that such an act of cutting, such an imperative of saying detached from truth, acknowledges that the relationship between the curator and their objects of research moves beyond traditional notions of selection, mediation, or interpretation. In the encounter between curatorial practice and artistic practice, none of the parties invested in the relationship remain untouched and unaffected. Curatorial practice experiences the urgency of creating a space in order to produce an act of enunciation and writes itself into a situation. I would argue that the ethics of such practice implies that the figure of the curator must let him or herself be possessed by their object of research, and therefore at the same time dispossessed. Here, I understand ‘dispossession’ in the context of the definition proposed by Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou of a ‘dispossessed subject’:

We recognized that both of us thought that ethical and political responsibility emerges only when a sovereign and unitary subject can be effectively challenged, and that the fissuring of the subject, or its constituting ‘difference’, proves central for a politics that challenges both property and sovereignty in specific ways.³⁰²

They further write:

dispossession encompasses the constituted, preemptive losses that condition one’s being dispossessed (or letting oneself become dispossessed) by another: one is moved to the other and by the other — exposed to and affected by one’s vulnerability.³⁰³

Such a concept of dispossession sheds a different light on the problematic task of caring, as I previously engaged with. Just as Certeau’s notion of cutting out brings to the fore a fundamental violence inherent to acts of selection and interpretation, stressing the alteration of one’s object of research and unveiling the urgency to deal with the responsibility that comes with such a work, Butler and Athanasiou’s notion of dispossession uncovers in turn the loss and the dependency at the core of the curatorial task of caring, affirming that,

³⁰² Butler and Athanasiou, *Dispossession*, preface, page 4, Kindle edition for mac

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, Chapter 1, page 2, Kindle edition for mac.

dispossession stands as a heteronomic condition for autonomy, or, perhaps more accurately as a limit to the autonomous and self-sufficiency of the liberal subject.³⁰⁴ Curatorial practice and artistic practice are intricately dependent on one another and this is not something to agree or disagree with but rather to pay attention to and explore the multiple, complex, and enriching relationships that produce incessant tensions between autonomy and dependence.

Certeau's relationship to mystic subjects whose lives and corpus of texts he studied at length established a new approach to mystic thought, and perhaps, as well as, a new approach to the ethics of any research endeavour in the context of the humanities to which curatorial practice pertains. Through this operation of cutting, inhabiting, and letting oneself be dispossessed, Certeau's central concern is the ethical issue of alterity; an alterity, which ambiguously, and importantly, supposes the alterity of the individual subject as well as the alterity inherent to the relationship between two separate subjects. French historian François Dosse writes:

The intervention of the historian presupposes to make a place for the other while maintaining the relationship with the subject that constructs the historical discourse. In regard to the past, to what has disappeared, history 'supposes a gap, which is the very act of constituting itself as existing and thinking today. My research taught me that while studying Surin I distinguished myself from him'.³⁰⁵

In these words of Dosse, it is suggested that Certeau's concept of alterity does not precede the relationship between the researcher and his object of research but it is rather inherent to the encounter between one and the other in the sense that alterity is inseparable from alteration: subjectivity is produced in a movement that supposes a confirmation of the self as much as an alteration of the self by the encounter with the other. In order to further qualify the relationship between alterity and alteration in the context of Certeau's practice, Dosse refers to Edward Saïd and writes:

The task that is incumbent upon intellectuals is according to [Saïd] to distance themselves from their attachments, their ideological affiliations as well as their national belonging in order to assert in every occasion the criteria of truth. It results in? an intellectual profile that, defined by Saïd, corresponds quite well with the trajectory of Michel de Certeau: 'I define the intellectual as someone in exile, a

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, chapter 1, page 2, Kindle edition for mac.

³⁰⁵ François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau : un historien de l'altérité*, Texte inédit, conférence à Mexico, septembre 2003. <http://www.ihtp.cnrs.fr/historiographie/spip.php%3Farticle57&lang=fr.html> (Translation is mine) / Michel de Certeau, *L'absent de l'histoire* (Paris : Mame, 1973), 158 (Translation is mine).

marginal, an amateur, and finally the author of a language that attempts to speak truthfully to power'.³⁰⁶

Certeau acknowledges that alteration produces the space of a different 'I' in his work, since he cannot hold the real within his object but rather has to cut through it. This 'I' is not the expression of an identity, yet affirms a different sort of existence: Certeau is an author, undeniably so; yet, the concept of authorship that emerges from his discourse and practice distances itself from the concepts of identity, sovereignty, and property that neo-liberalism has come to associate with authorship.

In curatorial practice, authorship can appear as a social reward for fulfilling a function that often seems devoid of responsibility beyond the criteria defined by institutions; further, seemingly ignoring the responsibility to become conscious of the limitations imposed by neo-liberalism; while other positions contradict this very lack of responsibility to instead demonstrate their keen awareness regarding the problems of authority and authorship that arise in the context of curatorial practice.

Curator Anna Colin has questioned her position regarding the distribution of authority, the claim of authorship, and the production of knowledge. I have previously referred to my involvement in Colin's project on the figure of the witch in the expanded cultural, social, and political contexts of the contemporary period.³⁰⁷ In the process of working on the second phase of her project — including an exhibition at le Quartier, in Quimper, and a new publication — she approached a small number of close collaborators, requesting that we ask her some questions on the project, to which she would respond in her essay. In response to some of these questions, the notion of possession emerged not only within the confines of Colin's field of research but also at the thresholds separating her as a subject from her object of study. Colin writes:

The attitude Chidgey describes calls for a digression about where I myself stand in terms of identification with the witch figure. I do not make a habit of placing myself at

³⁰⁶ Edward Saïd, *Des intellectuels et du pouvoir* (Paris : Seuil, 1998), 15, in François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau : un historien de l'altérité*.

³⁰⁷ Anna Colin's research taking the figure of the witch as an object of study began in the context of the grant she received from Centro Cultural Montehermoso in 2010. Colin continued to develop her research, presented it in various material forms and across different institutional frameworks: in 2012, she curated a cycle of three exhibitions under the title 'Plus ou Moins Sorcières' at Maison Populaire in Montreuil, France; she published a first anthology of texts following this initial series of exhibitions, titled *Witches: hunted, appropriated, empowered, queered* (edited by Anna Colin, B42, 2012). Colin curated another group exhibition on the invitation of centre d'art Le Quartier in Quimper, France, titled 'L'heure des sorcières', 1 February – 18 May 2014, and edited a second publication titled *The Witching Hour*.

the centre of things — I prefer shadows for many reasons — but this project, unlike any other in the past, has given rise to recurrent questions about my relationship with this figure. I decided to ask people who are close to me, and who have been following my research since it began, to ask me a question of their choosing. They replied with the following:

Do you associate yourself with this designation?

Where do you see yourself in works that evoke identification with witches?

*Can your work be situated in the fields you're mapping, and if so, how?*³⁰⁸

Colin confesses here to the central role of contagion that plays out between the figure of the witch, her own self, and her curatorial practice. She expresses her difficulty in coming to terms with the proximity between these elements, particularly because she fears to 'place herself at the centre of things', which I would argue is the fear to betray the public responsibility she invests in her curatorial practice by privileging her own perspective and interests over the collective; in addition, the fear to make herself more visible. Colin adds:

Although my work as a curator had often drawn my attention towards historical, marginalised and rebellious figures and communities (colonised people, suffragettes, the Black Panthers), the witch offered me something more personal and meaningful, as well as 'legitimacy'. Indeed, this figure (or its projection) is, like me, a woman, a feminist, Western and contemporary. The witch often acts alone, yet belongs to a community of interest; she is wise, earnest and defiant; she feels; she believes in a just world and in unbelievable things. To this extent, yes, I associate myself with this designation. And it is also for this reason that this project is both personal and collective. Many other individuals in search of identity, sovereignty (over their bodies and actions), or a history to which to belong, have looked for strength, inspiration and legitimacy in a figure from the past.³⁰⁹

Colin therefore appears to be letting herself be possessed by the figure of the witch, and in the context of this specific act of possession, the figure of the witch encompasses a multiplicity of subjects and objects of research — including artists and works of art — with which Colin comes in contact and against which she repeatedly experiences the unstable contours of her own subjectivity. In this project, she brought forward a set of questions and concerns that had a more intimate and personal resonance, which she most directly confronts in the context of her writing. Her concern with positioning herself at the centre reflects her problematic

³⁰⁸ Anna Colin, 'Introduction', *The Witching Hour*, ed. Anna Colin (Paris: B42, 2014), 10.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 10–11.

relationship to visibility — distinguishable from the notion of prominence. In drawing attention to aspects of her personal history and her feelings, Colin makes something of herself that is not directly related to her professional function visible. Moreover, such a visibility leads her to reflect on the ethics of her position in relationship with artistic practice. Such a curatorial project also challenges the traditional structures and economy of the exhibition: it developed over a period of several years and through the support of multiple institutions. The temporality and economy of such a project led Colin to put forward the following questions:

Is the use of the exhibition as a field of experimentation and thesis consolidation compatible with the responsibilities (whether intellectual, or those relating to representation, mediation or establishing connections) associated with the profession of curator? And are the space, the time and the exhibition budget sufficient for developing research extending over the long term?³¹⁰

These questions hint at a reconsideration of what we associate with the terms exhibition and curator, and suggest the necessity to reflect on the inscription of curatorial practice and exhibition making in public space, raising the problem of public expectations and of responsibility towards a broader collective or community. The questions regarding her responsibilities as a curator that emerge from Colin's self-reflexive detour in her introductory essay address a paradoxical dimension of curatorial practice. Colin indeed suggests that, in the present context, there might be contradictions at the core of the curatorial function, which have to do with the difficulty to adjust the experimental and unresolved character of research to the institutional demands regarding clarity and affirmation when it comes to representation and mediation. Moreover, the long-term economic support that such research ambition demands also appears in contradiction with the short-term economy of exhibition projects, particularly in art institutions of a smaller scale whose financial support is increasingly undermined and places their very existence as institutions at risk. Colin's questions point to the ambiguity and lack of clarity that characterizes the relationship between exhibition and research, between the figure of the curator and the figure of the researcher or the academic.

In her contribution to a publication titled *L'art contemporain et son exposition*, curator Catherine David emphasized the paradoxical relationship between the exhibition as a particular form of presentation of art, and contemporary art practices that she defines as

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 8.

‘experimental’, which ‘exceed the unique register of the visible and of the object’.³¹¹ David thus points to the limits of the classical exhibition space — of which the white cube serves as point of reference. Back in 2001, David pointed out the inadequacy of current institutions in regards to the transformations of artistic practices, stressing phenomena of instrumentalization and spectacularization in both institutional and commercial settings, and thus highlighted the difficulties for experimental practices to be accessible and sustain themselves in this context. David determined that the majority of spaces for the presentation of contemporary art are ‘places of cultural consumption without quality’³¹² and affirms that,

it is not only about finding strategies of avoidance but to understand how this model accompanies an ideological and economic programme that we can refuse in favour of a variety of places and experiences, more inventive processes of mediation, more open modes of discussion and circulation.³¹³

Experimental research, whether led by artists or curators, brings to the fore the necessity to provide economic and political support in the long-term. I would argue that the decisive difference between traditional curatorial practices — even if the mode of presentation is not an exhibition per se, that is, for example, events programming or publications — and the form of curatorial practice exemplified by Colin’s project here relies on the indetermination related to the duration and the possible outcomes of research. The difference points to the distinction between the outcome of the process and the process itself. Colin engages with curatorial research as a process whose outcome is not determined and cannot be final. The other crucial characteristic of Colin’s practice has to do with the engagement of the figure of the curator in the context of collective responsibility, unveiling a form of contagion from one figure to another: the figure of the witch, the figure of the curator, the notion of self, and the idea of a collective.

Colin writes:

Witches: hunted, appropriated, empowered, queered, without meaning to invalidate the authors’ competencies, claims some measure of amateurism. Here the term ‘amateur’ is understood in the sense which it is used by artist and writer Claire Pentecost. In her manifesto on the researcher-artist (which could be partly applied to the researcher-curator, or even the researcher-activist), Pentecost uses the expression

³¹¹ Catherine David, ‘Accompagner la discursivité de l’art expérimental’, in *L’art contemporain et son exposition (I)* (Paris : l’Harmattan, 2002), 63 (Translation is mine).

³¹² The original terms in French are ‘*lieux de consommation culturelle sans qualité*’.

³¹³ David, ‘Accompagner la discursivité de l’art expérimental’, 69.

‘public amateur’ to designate those who serve ‘as conduit between specialised knowledge fields and other members of the public sphere.’³¹⁴

By claiming the term ‘amateur’, as she defined above, Colin implicitly destabilizes her relationship to authorship. Further, I would argue that her approach challenges the way authorship has been reclaimed in the context of curatorial practice set within the conditions of neo-liberalism, in which the value of work is entangled with its acknowledged authorial status embedded in the value of the signature and thus available to forms of speculation. Such understanding brings us back to the issue of the commons and the gradual disappearance of such collective modes of ownership through the development of capitalism at the centre of Colin’s research. Forms of collective research and production, or shared authorship appear fundamental in Colin’s curatorial practice.³¹⁵ The amateur, exiled, dispossessed curatorial subject brings forward a figure that no longer fulfils the professional template of the expert, mobile, creative, and flexible curator of contemporary art. And yet, one must acknowledge that these two paradigms are rather difficult to distinguish. Pursuing an experimental practice that appears to challenge habitual forms of value production in the context of both public and private institutions — commercially driven or not — no longer suffice as disruptions and as a refusal to the conditions inherent to neo-liberalism. As I will consider in the following sections, neo-liberalism has gradually absorbed the values championed by experimental practices, making it even harder to bypass its system of value production and modes of subjection in order to declare a different allegiance.

³¹⁴ Anna Colin, ‘Introduction’ in *Witches: hunted, appropriated, empowered, queered*, ed. Anna Colin (Paris: B42, 2012), 23.

³¹⁵ Anna Colin is the co-director of Open School East, which she co-founded with Lawrence Taylor (who also acts as co-director), Sarah McCrory and Sam Thorne. Her engagement in OSE reflects Colin’s curatorial concerns encompassing activism and alternatives approaches in various economic, cultural and pedagogical fields, which her project on the figure of the witch relevantly brought forward.

Open School East was founded in 2013 in response to spiralling tuition fees and student debt. It was instituted as a space for artistic learning and production that is experimental, versatile and highly collaborative.

More information: <http://www.openschooleast.org/>

Section III.2.3 — The withdrawal of the subject and its dispersion through multiple figures

I have attempted to look for processes of political and ethical transformation in the context of curatorial practice, and to disclose modes of operating within curatorial practice that could propose relationships to alterity and the production of subjectivity that differ from the conditions characteristic of neo-liberalism. As I suggested in my discussion regarding Colin's curatorial practice, such difference nevertheless takes hold on tenuous ground as it relies on making a distinction between an 'anything goes' and the de-hierarchization between distraction and desire, consumption and contamination, flexibility and plasticity, between fiction and fabulation. In the following section, I will consider two approaches to contemporary subjectivity that both propose to critique flexible forms of subjectivity inherent to neo-liberalism, which is set in contrast, on the one hand, with a concept of anthropophagic subjectivity developed by Suely Rolnik since the 1980s,³¹⁶ and on the other hand, with a concept of plasticity developed by Catherine Malabou.

Suely Rolnik departs from an analysis of the production of subjectivity that she began in the 1980s and continues to pursue in relation to changing political and economic conditions. Originally from Brazil, Rolnik finds in the notion of the 'anthropophagous' — referring to the custom of the Tupi Indians — a relevant metaphor to define a production of subjectivity detached from the notion of identity as a 'stable landscape of solid land'.³¹⁷ José Oswald de Sousa Andrade who published his *Manifesto Antropófago* in 1928 was already invested in the critical potential of the notion of anthropophagy. Rolnik writes:

During the 1930s, anthropophagy acquired a meaning that extrapolates from the literalness of the act of devouring practiced by the Indians. The so-called Anthropophagous Movement extracted and reaffirmed the ethical formula of the relationship with the other that governs this ritual in order to make it migrate to the sphere of culture.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Suely Rolnik has developed the concept of anthropophagic subjectivity over a period stretching from the 1980s until now, thus allowing for this concept to transform according to the changes at work on the political, economic and cultural contexts.

³¹⁷ Suely Rolnik, 'Anthropophagic Subjectivity', in *Arte Contemporanea Brasileira: Um e/entre Outro/s* (Sao Paulo: Fundação Bienal de Sao Paulo, 1998). Last accessed 9 June 2015. URL: http://www.corner-college.com/udb/cproPe0yM7Suley_Rolnik.pdf

³¹⁸ Rolnik recalls the relationship between the modernist concept of anthropophagy and the practice of the indigenous Tupinambás. The rituals carried out by the Tupinambás were constituted by different stages, only one of which could be defined as cannibalism. Anthropologists Manuela Carneiro da Cunha and Eduardo Viveiros de Castro claim that 'having killed the enemy, the executor would change his name and have scars made in his

Viewed by Rolnik as a significant aspect to heritage of Brazilian modernity, the anthropophagic encompasses a culture that refuses to simply adjust itself to the culture and system of values brought by Europeans through colonialism. It refuses to reproduce hierarchies between high and low culture, spirit and body, experts and amateurs. Rolnik writes:

Anthropophagy's power lies exactly in the irreverent affirmation of a mixture that does not respect any form of a priori cultural hierarchy, since for this mode of cultural production all repertoires are potentially equivalent as resources to produce meaning, and only this is of any importance.³¹⁹

Half a century after Andrade, Rolnik picks up again the notion of anthropophagy in the context of the transformation of subjectivity to emphasize its potential instrumentalization and alteration in the service of the capitalist economy and neo-liberal system of values. Rolnik makes use of a distinction already present in Andrade's manifest between high and low anthropophagy in order to stress the tenuous threshold between two forms of subjectivity that seemingly call on the anthropophagic. For Andrade and for Rolnik, a fundamental dimension of the anthropophagic is the intense exposure to alterity, which is described as a violent act of contamination of one by the other. Rolnik affirms:

This strategy of desire defined by the irreverent juxtaposition that creates a tension between worlds that do not touch each other on the official map of existence, that demystifies every and all value a priori, that decentralizes and renders everything equally bastardized, sets into motion a mode of subjectivation that I will call 'anthropophagous'.³²⁰

The distinction between different forms of anthropophagy, which Rolnik distinguishes as active and reactive, lies in the nature of this exposure to alterity: 'to discover and desire the singularity of the other, without feeling shame in discovering and desiring, without feeling shame about expressing that desire, without fear of contaminating oneself'. She distinguishes such a desire for alterity from civil respect and narcissism, which 'consists in relating to the

body during a long and rigorous period of reclusion.' Rolnik further suggests that 'over time, names would accumulate following each confrontation with a new enemy, along with the engraving of each name in the flesh. ... The existence of the Other—not one, but many and distinct—was thus inscribed in the memory of the body, producing unpredictable becomings of subjectivity.' (Suelly Rolnik, 'Avoiding False Problems: Politics of the Fluid, Hybrid, and Flexible', in *eflux journal* #25, 2011. Last accessed 9 June 2015. URL: http://worker01.e-flux.com/pdf/article_230.pdf).

³¹⁹ Rolnik, 'Anthropophagic Subjectivity', In *Arte Contemporânea Brasileira: Um e/entre Outros*, São Paulo: Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 1998. URL: http://www.corner-college.com/udb/cproPe0yM7Suley_Rolnik.pdf Last accessed 9 June 2015

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

other for the simple pleasure of releasing desire without being exposed to otherness'.³²¹

Rolnik nevertheless confronts herself with a situation that has considerably changed since Andrade first conceived of the notion of cultural anthropophagy. If Andrade contrasts anthropophagy with identity, representation, and imitation, Rolnik undertakes the transformations inherent to late capitalism, which has championed notions of flexibility, adaptability, and creativity in the broader fields of economy, politics, and culture.

Rolnik writes:

However, the same absolute non-adhesion to any system of references, the same plasticity in mixing them together at will, the same freedom to improvise language as a result of the mixtures, which define the anthropophagous mode of subjectivization in its visible dimension, might constitute a kind of subjectivity in which, in invisibility, none of the previously mentioned characteristics is present. When this takes place, we face an actualized anthropophagy in its most reactive vector.³²²

Rolnik suggests that this seemingly anthropophagic mode, which has been adopted by neo-liberalism, makes the inherent plasticity of the anthropophagic into a principle of contemporary cultural identity. Thus, instead of getting rid of identity, the latter comes back in a violent backlash, collapsing in turn the ethical dimension of the anthropophagic by reintroducing the hegemonic. Rolnik writes:

The new regime integrates the displacement of a principle of subjectivation based on identity towards a flexible subjectivity, but only as a more successful way of reinstating the anaesthesia of the modern subject and his refusal of the effects of the living presence of the other in his own body.³²³

For Rolnik, the body plays a central role in producing a distinction between the two modes of subjectivity that summon the anthropophagic. The exposure to alterity at the core of the anthropophagic takes hold of the body, implying that such a form of subjectivity can only be embodied, and considers that a physical disposition is necessary in order to be attentive to the active and vital workings of sensitivity and desire.

Catherine Malabou proposes yet another conceptual framework within which one can think of the ideological pre-eminence of flexibility in the production of subjectivity today. Malabou attempts to connect the philosophical concept of 'plasticity', which she encounters in Hegel's

³²¹ *Ibid.*

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Suely Rolnik, *Anthropophagie Zombie* (Paris : BlackJack editions, 2011), 34 (Translation is mine).

philosophy, with the concept of plasticity in the context of neuroscience. Malabou defines plasticity as follows:

In ordinary speech, it designates suppleness, a faculty for adaptation, the ability to evolve. According to its etymology — from the Greek *plassein*, to mold — the word plasticity has two basic senses: it means at once the capacity to receive form (clay is called ‘plastic’, for example) and the capacity to give form (as in the plastic arts or in plastic surgery). Talking about the plasticity of the brain thus amounts to thinking of the brain as something modifiable, ‘formable’, and formative at the same time. ... But it must be remarked that plasticity is also the capacity to annihilate the very form it is able to receive or create. We should not forget that *plastique*, from which we get the words *plastiquage* and *plastiquer*, is an explosive substance made of nitroglycerine and nitrocellulose, capable of causing violent explosions. We thus note that plasticity is situated between two extremes: on the one side the sensible image of taking form (sculpture or plastic objects), and on the other side that of the annihilation of all form (explosion).³²⁴

Malabou’s materialist approach, which considers a material continuity between the neuronal and the mental, insists on an embodied approach to subjectivity. She argues that the revelations in neurosciences on the functioning of the brain have yet to have consequences for our understanding of subjectivity. She thus emphasizes a lack of ‘consciousness of the brain’ in the sense that we have not become aware of the significance of plasticity in regards to subjectivity. Malabou claims that plasticity could and should however constitute a fundamental theoretical tool to transform our approach to the production of subjectivity, specifically in opposition to the ideological ascendancy of flexibility imposed through the values inherent to neo-liberalism. Malabou writes:

Under the heading ‘flexibility’ the dictionary gives: ‘firstly, the character of that which is flexible, of that which is easily bent (elasticity, suppleness); secondly, the ability to change with ease in order to adapt oneself to the circumstances’. The examples given to illustrate the second meaning are those that everybody knows: ‘flexibility on the job, of one’s schedule (flex time, conversion), flexible factories’. The problem is that these significations grasp only one of the semantic registers of plasticity: that of receiving form. To be flexible is to receive a form or impression, to be able to fold oneself, to take the fold, not to give it. To be docile, to not explode. Indeed, what

³²⁴ Catherine Malabou, *What should we do with our brains?* (New York : Fordham University Press, 2008), 5 – 6.

flexibility lacks is the resource of giving form, the power to create, to invent or even to erase an impression, the power to style.³²⁵

For Malabou, despite the tenuous distinction between the two terms, plasticity, contrary to flexibility, offers the possibility for resistance to disciplining and normalizing modes of subjection, she writes:

The word plasticity thus unfolds its meaning between sculptural molding and deflagration, which is to say explosion. From this perspective, to talk about the plasticity of the brain means to see in it: not only the creator and receiver of form but also an agency of disobedience to every constituted form, a refusal to submit to a model.³²⁶

Malabou further defines flexibility as ‘a faculty described precisely in terms of synaptic plasticity — to fold, to render oneself docile vis à vis one's environment, in a word, to adapt to everything, to be ready for all adjustments’.³²⁷

She thus argues that plasticity and flexibility do not overlap, inasmuch as plasticity, unlike flexibility, supposes forms of resistance and tension; plasticity does not fit within a simplistic opposition between rigidity and flexibility. Departing from the neuroscience concept of plasticity, Malabou writes:

The plasticity of the self, which supposes that it simultaneously receives and gives itself its own form, implies a necessary split and the search for an equilibrium between the preservation of constancy (or, basically, the autobiographical self) and the exposure of this constancy to accidents, to the outside, to otherness in general (identity, in order to endure, ought paradoxically to alter itself or accidentalize itself). What results is a tension born of the resistance that constancy and creation mutually oppose to each other. It is thus that every form carries within itself its own contradiction. And precisely this resistance makes transformation possible.³²⁸

For Malabou, on the one hand, plasticity demonstrates the crucial contradiction at the core of our brain functions, leading us to conceive the self as the complex locus for constant transformation as well as constant resistance in order to maintain a sense of stability. On the other hand, flexibility — along with notions of mobility and creativity — has come to characterize the function of most of our social, cultural, and economic infrastructures as well as our own individual trajectories. Malabou emphasizes the crucial combination of

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

‘maintenance and evolution’ in the workings of plasticity, but she blames flexibility for ‘[confounding] them within a pure and simple logic of imitation and performance. It is not creative but reproductive and normative’.³²⁹ Malabou’s concept of plasticity importantly allows to think the relationship between the act of receiving form and the act of giving form without necessarily establishing a hierarchy between these two movements, without determining one active and the other passive. The concept of plasticity destabilizes at once the concept of identity (of the subject) as well as the concept of alterity. Malabou writes:

I am interested in showing that this relationship between form and itself is not founded on a difference. The two modes of being of the subject are not different from one another, but each of them transforms itself into the other. With plasticity, we are not facing a pre-given difference, but a process of metamorphosis.³³⁰

Through her extensive critique of flexibility, Malabou invites us to go further in thinking of plasticity as a critical tool to subvert neo-liberal ideology.

In the context of my project, both Rolnik and Malabou led me to consider how the figure of the curator might be discussed in relation to the terms of flexibility and plasticity. The figure of the curator might exemplify the ‘flexibility athlete’ that Rolnik describes as a subject who uncritically engages in the pursuit of performance and the elaboration of market strategies proper to neo-liberalism. In the first chapter, I exposed the transformation of the figure of the curator into the figure of the cultural entrepreneur, insisting on notions of creativity and mobility as central to the renewed professional model for curatorial practice. As far as this contemporary curatorial figure is concerned, flexibility meets entrepreneurship, and creativity and mobility define the professional template required for the curator on a broad international scale. It might not be necessary to stress again that in this context the professional template fulfilled by the figure of the curator no longer determines technical competence but rather describes vague subjective qualities. Considering anew the production of subjectivity through the lens of plasticity requires envisioning curatorial practice from the dual perspective of the reception of form and the giving of form, or to articulate it otherwise, the transformation of self and the inscription of self in the exercise of a practice that has the responsibility to address a much larger collectivity.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

³³⁰ Noelle Vahanian, ‘A conversation with Catherine Malabou’, *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* volume 9 n°1 (Winter 2008) : 4. Last accessed 16 August 2013.
URL: <http://www.jcrt.org/archives/09.1/Malabou.pdf>

Plasticity is fundamental to the concept of fabulation in order to avoid misunderstanding fabulation as a rhetorical operation consisting in a constant adjustment of one's action and speech to the variations of the situation, masking and unmasking itself, from new project to future project. Fabulation, on the contrary, hinges upon the difficulty to be in the present: '[staying] close to the events, [experiencing] them, be willing to be effected and affected by them'.³³¹ Being, acting, speaking in the present, the production of a fabulous, plastic subjectivity nevertheless turns itself toward the construction of the future, particularly as it attempts to challenge other modes of production of subjectivity that threaten its existence. Fabulation has been described as a means to constantly postpone the possibility of affirming authorship as an attempt to challenge the normative production of discourse, contesting the existence of a unique subject of discourse, sovereign and owner of his or her statement. In order to introduce new forms of discursive practices, the function of the author ceaselessly withdraws behind the multiple subjects of enunciation, collapsing traditional professional templates into floating, plastic figures that deny any normative allegiances and identities.

Reflecting on the political position of the literary writer, Walter Benjamin once suggested that it was each writer's responsibility to 'ask what was the position of that work vis à vis the social production relations of his time'.³³² Already back in the 1930s when he wrote these words, Benjamin claimed the necessity to consider so-called intellectual work, such as the work of literary writers, in line with the work of any other producer belonging to the class of the proletariat, thus making 'only one demand on the writer: the demand to *think*, to reflect upon his position in the production process'.³³³ If I prolong Benjamin's call to question one's position in the production process by bringing it into the present time and context, I face a painful contradiction. While valuing the possibility of dispossession, as in being dispossessed of the sovereignty and relations to property inherent to the claim of authorship in the context of neo-liberalism, and in releasing oneself from oneself, dis-identifying oneself in order to be disposed to an encounter with the other, I am also confronted with the professional and financial precariousness of many cultural workers, among them some people claiming the professional status of curators. This precariousness hardens the competition and encourages cultural workers to single themselves out according to the expectations of a neo-liberal mode

³³¹ Paul Rabinow, 'Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought', in *Michel Foucault: Ethics. Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New York Press, 1997), XVIII.

³³² Walter Benjamin, 'The Author as Producer', in *Understanding Brecht* (London: Verso, 1998), 87.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 101.

of value production. In this context, claiming authorship appears to represent the best if not, perhaps, the only way to protect one's rights and assure one's subsistence in the cultural field. The gap between one's work and one's life has never been so narrow. It seems particularly true of professional fields such as curatorial practice, or artistic practice, but we ought to think that it is true of many other professional areas that have gradually placed so much emphasis on the role of individuals' personalities, valuing their social network, their interests and hobbies and their ability to make use of their emotional experiences, or to rein them in to avoid disturbing their concentration, in the context of their work. Affective forms of engagement — be it, for example, friendship or love, empathy or belief — are no longer outside of ordinary economic exchanges and average professional tasks. Following his reading of Pierre Klossowski, curator Pierre Bal Blanc aptly questioned the possibility for imagining, in complicity with other artists, a space — in the form of an exhibition — through which he could inhabit the ambiguity and excess inherent to the affective dimension of the current economic and political conditions. Bal Blanc's 'la monnaie vivante' did not attempt to represent human living conditions through the mediation of works of art, but had the ambition to recreate, through a specific practice, an experience of economic, social, and political relationships liberated from a normative distribution of positions: a space organized by an unruly configuration of desires, impulses, needs, and their contagion. Given that personal and intimate experiences can no longer guarantee the existence of spaces outside of work and economic exchanges, one may wonder what it might mean to call on the engagement of the self and the care of the self as ways of resisting the condition in which we live in. The challenge might lie in redefining what we understand as personal and intimate experiences. Perhaps one should make everything about desire and pleasure to better cover one's tracks (Bal Blanc), or stay in the shadows, fearing to be seen (Colin), or strip the space of all things that may block vision (Smith), or get as far as possible from oneself to look for unimaginable experiences (Deliss), or else, constantly postpone the moment of revelation and demystification through the creation of new characters (Mullican, Malasauskas).

CHAPTER IV — PRESENTING A CURATORIAL PRACTICE WITH AGNES GEOFFRAY, Yael DAVIDS, Cally SPOONER, AND JEAN- PASCAL FLAVIEN

Agnès Geoffray, Yael Davids, Cally Spooner and Jean-Pascal Flavien

In the last months of writing my PhD thesis, I began to think about the ways I could approach the viva examination from the perspective of my curatorial practice. I wanted to produce a very specific articulation in my practice with the institutional context characteristic of the PhD examination. Because my PhD thesis engaged with issues of the conditions of curatorial practice, it seemed relevant to extend this critical investigation in the specific context of the examination. As I committed to further develop my academic practice in the context of my PhD project, I moved away from a specific mode of practice that I had carried out in the context of Tate Modern and searched for a new approach of curatorial practice. My engagement with curatorial practice in the context of academic research led me to question the gap between these two different registers of practice: one register that could be described as academic, and another register that could be described as professional. The form that I chose for the presentation of my curatorial practice in the context of my viva examination bore a set of questions that relate to the encounter between the two different registers. One of the central questions that I dealt with in my viva examination is the contradiction that emerges from the necessity to present a professional practice that usually relies on institutional means and facilities – exhibition budget, technical support, visibility and accessibility from the perspective of audiences – in the context of academia. In the context of the viva examination of my practice-based research in Curating, Goldsmiths University did not provide any budget or technical means adapted to the presentation of a curatorial practice in professional terms. However, throughout the period of my research, the academic context allowed me to critically reconsider a set of parameters and conditions inherent to professional practice, and called on a new positioning of curatorial practice in relation to its institutional and professional habits and behaviours. What are the minimum conditions a practice needs to exist? How much can we let go of an institutional mode of practice and still claim to have a professional practice as a curator? The presentation of my curatorial practice in the framework of the viva examination represented an attempt at facing these important questions that animated the repositioning of my practice throughout my experience within the academic context.

In the context of the viva examination of my practice-based PhD in Curating, I invited the artists Agnès Geoffray, Yael Davids, Cally Spooner and Jean-Pascal Flavien to take part in a presentation that took place at Goldsmiths, University of London. I told the artists that I would not show anything pertaining to past projects in order to use the space and time available for their contributions. I also did not set a deadline regarding their propositions: I intended to withdraw as much as possible from a professional situation within which anticipation and minute organization represent criteria of competency and performance. Instead, I focused on trust and on the feeling of gratitude that emerged from a situation within which these artists dedicated time to accompany me in the final phase of my PhD project. I came to realize that this situation revealed a space that I had not experienced before: although our relationship was formed through our professional activities, my invitation was addressed to them on grounds that were both professional and personal: I invited them to take part in this event both as artists and as friends. The institutional context within which this new collaboration with artists was taking place was unusual and therefore it had some weakness: there was, for example, almost no public profile for the event, and thus there was little at stake in terms of the visibility of their work. However, their commitment could not simply be made on the grounds of personal feelings given the fact that they had been invited as artists to contribute to a process of academic examination that had an evident professional dimension. In the following section, I will attempt to present the work of the artists in order to provide a context for their specific contributions in the framework of the PhD examination.

Agnès Geoffray's photographs and installations immerse the viewer in a series of stories, only a few fragments of which are shown. Starting from photographs which are either found, reproduced, or modified, or which record actions that she stages herself, the artist draws on different historical events and highlights postures and gestures evocative of acts of violence and representations of power. By using multiple iconographic registers and introducing language into the work, she asserts the essential role of fiction and invention in our relationship to words and images. In the stories that capture Geoffray's attention through their verbal or visual apparitions, the artist is often drawn to moments of disequilibrium: something or someone is falling or suspended, a tension has become visible, revealing relations of domination — in relation to gender, or in a pedagogical relation for example. Geoffray's work makes relations of power visible through her use of the lack, departing from what is missing in the narrative, and demanding that the viewer works on reconstructing, or completing, the

image, or the text.

In the work titled *Clamor* (2014), Geoffray juxtaposes two different performances: *Le Cri*, a performance for one man, and *Les Echappées*, a performance for five women. Working with the figure of the town crier, *Le Cri* stages the voice as an organ of power. Body and voice are shown as instruments of authority. *Les Échappées* stages feminine voices singing poems in two verses called Landays, which were elaborated by Afghan women often sequestered and enslaved. These sung poems constitute a form of resistance in face of the violence these women lived. The combination of both performances place these subversive and wilful women voices in tension with royal orders promulgated in public by the town crier, which condemned the conduct of women such as prostitutes or so-called “convulsionaries” for exhibiting themselves in public or in private. Geoffray collects stories that bear witness to the pervasiveness of forms of violence exerted on the bodies of individuals on whom domination is repeatedly practiced. She disregards hierarchy between narratives: it does not matter whether she refers to important historical events such as a war, or petty criminal acts recounted in newspapers. She does not take stories or images for granted; she does not antagonize them, or exploit their ability to provoke intense emotions. Instead she finds ways to work with these documents in order to transform the context of their reception, and provide the opportunity to critically rethink the relations of power that they may reveal. Most of her works have in common an interest in the figure of the victim who is subjected to a form of physical or psychological violence.

Yet in many of her works, spectators may become aware of the ambivalence that the artist suggests between suffering and pleasure. The porosity between these two opposite feelings becomes evident in works such as *les Enchantés* (2006) in which Geoffray appropriate traditional children rhymes in order to recount violent newspaper stories, using her own voice although she is not a competent singer. The combination is both amusing and profoundly unsettling. In *Performance* (2015), Geoffray asked a trained acrobat to perform a series of positions of suspension using a rope, superimposing the representation of the figure of the torture victim with the fascination of spectacle inherent to the figure of the circus artist.

Geoffray made the decision to read my PhD thesis back to back and chose to respond to its content by drawing on aspects of my arguments that she thought shared some affinities with her own work. She came up with two separate propositions: one consisted in imagining that

as a curator I could invent a story that would help explaining recurring elements in her work based on her biography. She wrote the story and asked me, as a curator, to embody and appropriate it by translating it into English and pass the story on to the audience during the event staged for the examination. Her other contribution consisted in choosing the extract of a royal order from the 17th century banning women to expose themselves in public or private contexts in acts of convulsions, threatening them to be imprisoned if they were known of behaving in such a way. Such a royal order was transmitted at the time through the voice of a town crier, a man's voice embodying the law. Her idea was to allow me to intervene upon such a text in order to alter it and, consequently, transform its content and collective reading in the context of the event. Different possibilities for such an alteration were envisaged. Initially, she wanted me to write the text on the floor using stencil and charcoal powder, however this possibility was ruled out because there was not enough time available to install such a work. She decided that the text would be projected on the wall using an overhead projector. She provided me with a thick black permanent marker pen in order to erase words and thus engage in a rewriting of the original text.

Grammar appears as a set of rules, conventions, and norms that regulate language within the context of a clearly identified objective: that of communication. Architecture, like language, organizes itself around rules, conventions, or norms that, within a specific cultural context, determine what that entity is that we call "a house." Jean-Pascal Flavien's practice locates itself at the intersection between the field of language and the field of architecture; it is entirely architectural and poetic, and calls on a reconsideration of norms and rules in both fields. Flavien's houses are inscribed within specific contexts, engaging a dialogue with the heterogeneous dimensions of their surroundings. Each house generates situations, including events that can take place somewhere else than where the house is built. A house can also generate a situation before being built, or while it is being built. Flavien's houses are architectural and poetic situations that constitute invitations addressed to other people to engage with them, through different forms of inhabitation, which might not imply being there physically. The compositions of Flavien's houses are not fixed; they are unstable, wobbly even. The exterior world is itself not fixed, but in movement, so why set down the arrangement of a house? Daily life can be represented as a juxtaposed sequence of events: waking, showering, eating, working, eating, working, walking, reading, eating, sleeping ... Once again, relatively strict norms seem to determine this organization of our time, and in turn impact how spaces are organized. Flavien simultaneously unsettles both the normative

approaches of grammar and architecture, undoing the logic of sequences of actions, introducing absurdity, illogic, and irrationality in our use of space. He problematizes hierarchies, habits, and rhythms, inasmuch as the latter petrify situations and exclude other ways of seeing, saying, or doing, defying the logic of continuity and discontinuity for that of juxtaposition, parataxis, and the contiguity of spaces, words, and moments.

For his contribution to the PhD examination, Flavien proposed to send the first inhabitant of his new house in Monaco to London, in order for the inhabitant to speak in place of the house in the exhibition. This proposition seemed to echo a series of on-going conversations that Flavien and I had had in relation to his houses and his conception of living. I had indeed previously asked Flavien to move the content of *no drama house* from Berlin to Maastricht when I was at the Jan van Eyck Academie in 2011, and we performed the work *PLAY* together in this new setting. I had also spent five days living in *breathing house* built in the garden of centre d'art Parc St Léger in Pougues les eaux in 2012. Although *folding house* was not yet built, Flavien met with Lola Drubigny, a former student of mine who lives in Nice, and they talked about the house before Lola came to London.

Yael Davids' engagement with performance stems from her particular interest in the space between the stage and the audience, questioning what this distance represents, and how one can transform the distribution of places and roles in such a situation. Her work also invests the gap between one's body and one's voice, describing their essential relation as well as their split. The distinction between body and voice is one of the many elements in Davids' practice that points toward her engagement with issues of identity and migrations. Davids wrote: 'In my work there is a denial of a fixed territory; my work exists for a moment, and afterwards, what is left is a void, an absence, an object that "has been"'.³³⁴ Davids' work and her body follow trajectories of never arriving, or ending. Her work could thus be described as inoperative, following Jean-Luc Nancy's definition of the term.

Inoperativity is not the negative of the work: it is that which, in the work or more precisely, in the working, exceeds the product, the satisfaction, the fulfillment, at each moment and endlessly.³³⁵

Davids' practice explores notions of hospitality and nomadism, affirming the necessity of

³³⁴ Yael Davids, 'Letter to Vasif Kortun', in *End on Mouth. All talking is shit. I go*, 2007

³³⁵ Chantal Pontbriand, 'Jean-Luc Nancy: an exchange', in 'The idea of community' *Parachute* n°100, 2000

abandoning a traditional approach of identity and nationality. Although she often alludes to her life in Israel, to her family, she refers to herself as an immigrant and affirm that she has no fixed place, no fixed identity, or: her identity resides in constant movement, implying the transformation of her body, and her subjectivity: it transforms through performance, and repetition. She declares:

I repeat my previous performance. It is now a score and I follow step by step my own footsteps—detecting the moments and things that were not named. I am the background. I am the stage. I am the story. I am a repetition. I am a repetition.³³⁶

In her work, Davids puts her body to the test, challenging her ability to speak, and perform, while undermining the verticality of standing up, not giving her lungs the space necessary to breathe and project her voice. In *Learning to Imitate* (2010), and *Learning to Imitate in Absentia* (2011), she used ropes, stairs, or slanted structures, which extended her previous work with the large enclosed boxes moved around by a group of performers, lifting it from the ground, and moving it around the space in *End on Mouth* (2006). Davids declares the body as a site of resistance, and as the resource for new beginnings and new possibilities. Through the practice of Feldenkrais, Davids envisions the movements of her body in relation to verticality, horizontality, and depth. Her practice of Feldenkrais represents a fundamental rethinking of how one move in relation to space, and in relation to others; it appears as a new attempt at caring for herself, and caring for others.

Two days before my departure to London, Yael Davids explained that in the context of her contribution she needed someone to give her a musical rhythm so she can perform a series of movements in response to the musical beat; she referred to Noa Eshkol's own use of the metronome in her performances. She wanted me to give her the beat in person and asked me if I could play a musical instrument. She also thought of my voice, thinking I could use words and breathing sounds, but she preferred musical notes. I confessed that I played the flute when I was a child (between the age of 9 and 13) but I had not played since. She asked me if I could locate a flute and bring it to London, which I did. She suggested that I would only need to play some single musical notes following simple patterns.

Cally Spooner's practice engages with the notion of performance as a modality of labour specific to today's attention economies, which is shared by different fields of practice,

³³⁶ Yael Davids, from the script of '*Learning to Imitate in Absentia II*', 2011

including artistic and curatorial practice as well as acting, philosophy, pop music, or corporate rhetoric. She has developed a practice of writing through a mode of appropriation, borrowing words from these different fields, and operating within the codes of different performance genres such as the Broadway musical, the music pop video or the television interview. The focus of her research in the last few years has been the nature and conditions of the production of speech-based labour. She explores how the production of language and the use of rhetoric have become so central to the transformation of labour in our contemporary context. She is concerned with the mode of subjection defined by the automation of speech and the increasing production of norms in regard to the use of language. In the work titled *Stage directions for a public speaker* (2010), Spooner produced a list of instructions for a performer who was asked to deliver an academic text that Spooner had written. This work was later re-used by Spooner in the context of a lecture I gave titled *A stuttering exhibition* during which Spooner stood next to me while I spoke, and interrupted me randomly and inappropriately with her stage directions.

What Does Your Family Think Of What You Do? (2014) is a sound piece consisting of a sequence of rounds of applause, with people clapping and cheering. This piece was recorded while Spooner was working with a group of students on her work titled *Off Camera Dialogue* (2013), which consists in the transcript of the interview of an employee named Bob. Bob is encouraged to change his language and behaviour in order to adapt or make his speech “ready” so that he can star in a TV commercial, made by an advertising agency, in which he would represent the brand values of the corporation he worked for, by disclosing his private life and aspirations. To make him sound better for the cameras, the interviewer keeps correcting his speech: “Do it Again”, “Say it again one more”, “Try again”. Spooner stresses that the students really picked up on the paradoxical nature of this encouragement, which coerced Bob into performing, and they came up with the idea of a round of applause. These two pieces emphasize the idea that such speech-based labour cannot function without an audience.

Through her practice Cally Spooner engages with figures that have become archetypal as enablers, as persons who have become a technology in the sense that they facilitate, and mediate, they help something become more available, or more operational for someone else. In that sense the figure of the curator seems exemplary. The curator appears as a vessel, he or she quite literally carries, embodies, speaks, and makes way for artists. The curator is

representative of the production of a form of outsourced subjectivity, subjected to the contradictory demands to perform one *self*, whilst conforming to specific norms and models in regard to performance and rhetoric. In the context of the PhD examination, Spooner thought of the form of an interview that either she or a performer would conduct with me in front of the examiners. We never exchanged about the exact content of the questions she would ask me, but she told me a few days before the event that she was using questions she wrote for a fictional interview with the actor Kevin Spacey.

Spectatorship, passivity, and fabulation

The written element of my thesis proposes to investigate the conditions within which curatorial practice operates in the present day context, and to examine specific dimensions of curatorial practice that are undermined, undervalued and pushed towards the margins of its inscription as a professional activity. I chose to question the relationship between the figure of the curator and the condition of spectatorship, proposing to assess the role granted to observation, attention and vision within curatorial work. Instead of defining the figure of the curator as a figure distinct from the figure of the spectator — understood as the visitor of an exhibition, the viewer of a film, or the spectator of a performance — I tried to think of spectatorship as a condition of experience that is common to the figure of the curator, the figure of the artist, or the figure of the attendee in the context of artistic institutions. In my approach of the condition of spectatorship I purposely tried to connect distinct notions of observation, attention and vision in order to allow for multiple and paradoxical figures of the spectator to emerge and steer against rigid oppositions between spectatorship and participation. Reconsidering the time and space dedicated to observation, the conditions allow different forms of attention, and the approach of vision in curatorial practice called on a critical examination of economic, political and philosophical dimensions of curatorial labour. The contestation of the opposition between activity and passivity within this field of discussion led to a particular engagement with the notion of passivity that seemed directly associated with spectatorship, on the one hand, and tied to notions of assistance and care, on the other hand. My exploration of the notion of passivity followed distinct approaches in regard to context and discipline that allowed for multiple and contradictory positions of passivity to emerge. Refuting the possibility of a definition of passivity as simple inaction or inactivity, it was nevertheless fundamental in the context of curatorial practice to examine the nature of curatorial labour in relation to passivity in order to stress the problematic assumption that curatorial practice's core set of tasks consists in activities that are productive, visible, quantifiable and considered as authorial. The emphasis on passivity in the context of curatorial practice is an attempt to produce a critical position in regards to an approach of activity and of labour that force labouring subjects — here curators — into complying with professional models within which they no longer have the possibility to challenge the normative framework that rules their actions, speech, or behaviour. In this context, I also brought forward the concept of fabulation in order to further emphasize the necessity to call into question an increasingly controlled discursive production, in verbal or material forms.

Calling on a broad range of practices, and more specifically mystic practices as they were discussed in Michel de Certeau's writing, I located fabulation in the manifestation of a desire to ceaselessly reinvent the discursive tools that allow the production of subjectivity.

One of the aims that I wanted to achieve in the practical element of the viva examination was to stage an event that would be in dialogue with past, present and future curatorial projects. I thought of this practical element as a direct outcome of my PhD project in the sense that the development of my writing within the context of the PhD made the idea for this event possible; but I also thought of this event as a project facing outward, towards the future of my practice, allowing for new working relationships to unfold. The relationship to time and to experience that I envisaged through this curatorial event was characterised by its potentiality: coming out of a period of writing that required some necessary clarification, I had the desire with this new project to open up a field of new possibilities for my practice.

I wanted to set up conditions that would allow me to transform the habitual expectations concerning such an examination: I intended to share the process of decision-making regarding the event and thus abandon some control over important aspects of the examination of my PhD thesis. In this specific situation, I located and defined passivity in a form of delegation of decision-making to the artists I invited to be part of the event. I did not deny that from a curatorial perspective, I continued to fulfil a habitual role of curator: I selected and invited the artists Agnès Geoffray, Jean-Pascal Flavien, Yael Davids and Cally Spooner to participate in the project and I proposed to them detailed parameters within which we could work together. However, in the specific context of my PhD examination, these working conditions placed me in a position that I would describe as weak from the point of view of control and agency. Such a weakness in regard to my curatorial position will be discussed further in a subsequent section of this text, following a detailed description of the event that occurred.

Presentation of my practice: January 22nd, studio A, Barriedale buildings, Goldsmiths University of London

The event took place in one single space and consisted in the unfolding of five different works by four invited artists. It began with my intervention, outside of the space, during which I addressed the examiners and gave them a text that I wrote as an introduction.

Putting an end to this PhD project inaugurates a new phase for my curatorial practice. I invited four artists to take part in this exhibition. I chose them because of our mutual knowledge of each other's practices, and because I continue to pursue with all of them individually forms of dialogue that crucially inform my curatorial practice today.

I have given them access to my PhD thesis and to the documentation of my practice, giving them complete freedom to decide upon the form that their contribution could take.

They were aware of some of the constraints related to the context of the examination viva voce: the exhibition would take place at Goldsmiths College on Friday 22nd January 2016; it would first be accessible only by the examiners, but could later be open to members of the public. I also told them that I would not show anything pertaining to past projects, so that their contributions would constitute the entirety of the exhibition for the examination.

My desire was to give up as much as possible of my authority over this dimension of my examination in order to delegate key aspects of the decision-making process to them. This exhibition continues with a testing of passivity and its complex politics: on the one hand, I will be in a position of spectator, looking at these works for the first time, on the other hand, some of the artists will make use of my own body as part of their contributions.

As the examiners entered the space, they could see Cally Spooner seating on a chair in the space; they could see Lola Drubigny seating on another chair placed in proximity of an architectural model of Jean-Pascal Flavien's house project to be built in the garden of Villa Paloma, one of the two locations of musée d'art contemporain of Monaco; and they could see the extract of a text chosen by Agnès Geoffray projected on a wall with an overhead projector.

We have been informed that, due to imaginative disorder or in view to deceive, several women pretend to be struck by convulsions and even make an exhibition of themselves in certain private houses, to abuse the credulity of the people. Nothing is more

important than stopping such excesses the most efficient and rapid way. Consequently we forbid any person with supposed convulsionary tendencies to make an exhibition of themselves in public, or even to suffer in their own houses, in their bedrooms, or other places and assemblies, or else they will be imprisoned and prosecuted in extraordinary fashion, as seducers and disruptors of public peace.

I stayed outside for the first five minutes of the event during which Lola Drubigny introduced the work of Jean-Pascal Flavien, who was not present. The architectural model, made of cardboard, was hung on the wall according to Flavien's instructions. It helped materialize the house and allow the viewers to see how the spatial distribution would function. After the examiners entered the room, Lola stood up and talked to them:

Hello, I'm Lola I'm the inhabitant of the folding house, the project of Jean-Pascal Flavien. To tell the truth, I have never been there because the house is not constructed yet. The last time I went in Monaco there was only the floor of the house so it was a kind of ... so I only can imagine what it will be like, how it will be, I don't know. The first time I heard about this project, of the house in Monaco, I really imagined a different kind of house, not that kind of architectural artistic house. I only imagined something like an old Monegasque house, rich, with a lot of patterns, I don't know. And it's kind of difficult for me to express in English, I'm not so comfortable but... And so yes, the house will be in the garden of villa Paloma which is a museum in Monaco so I'm really wondering how it will be wandering in the garden, it's never winter, there are a lot of plants, flowers. I don't know how many nights I will go there. Maybe will come some people, it's a public garden so I wonder how it will be to eat, sleep and have people all around, I don't know well, I don't know what to say anymore.

When Lola spoke to the examiners about the house, she was unsure of what she could say, of what she would say. She took her time before standing up, letting some silence fill the room. And again after she spoke, she sat down and remained silent.

After Lola sat down, Yael Davids and I entered the space. I switched off the overhead projector. Yael invited the examiners to sit down on three chairs previously placed in the room for that purpose, and we began a performance. The performance consisted in five different sequences of movements performed by Yael Davids on the floor. Each sequence of movement was carried out at a different spot, creating a circulation of our bodies in the room, leading Yael to exit the room during the last sequence. I performed with her each of these

sequences accompanying her movements by playing the flute. In the first sequence, Yael and I lay down on the floor; I had one of my ears placed against one of hers. Yael performed slow rotations with one leg, then both legs, while moving her head at a similar rhythm. I breathed slowing through the flute, making an approximate music note. In the second sequence, Yael lay down facing me as I stood up. She moved her hand in front of her mouth as if she was mimicking an act of feeding or ingesting, as the rest of her body performed a movement of squirming. I unsteadily played the same note at a very slow pace. In the third sequence, Yael lay down her back to me with her arms and legs spread on the floor. I played one high pitch note at a vivid rhythm as she repeatedly lifted her arms and legs simultaneously and let them fall on the floor. In a fourth sequence, Yael positioned herself on all fours and alternately bent parts of her body following the rhythm of the flute. In the final sequence, both Yael and I lay down on the floor, heads in the direction of the exit of the room. I stayed still, playing the same high pitch note at a regular rhythm while Yael crawled on her back following the rhythm of the flute until she was out of sight.

When the performance ended, I stood up and switched the overhead projector back on and began to erase some of the words using a large black pen. I walked towards the examiners who had remained seated and told them a story:

Agnès Geoffray has often told me about her fear to have her eyes punctured, fear that appears unfounded as fears usually are. Nevertheless I connected this fear with different works of hers. The photographic series titled *Nights*, realized in complete darkness, letting opalescent eyes appear; or the installation titled *Palimpsest* constituted of words written using pins in the wall; or *Testimony*, a sound and light installation that immerses the viewer in obscurity.

Some time ago I learned through someone else that, when Agnès was still a little girl, her uncle and a young woman went in the house of an older man in order to steal. They came with bottles of wine with the aim to get him drunk, but the careful old man showed some resistance, refused to drink and said: "I keep an eye on you and believe me I have photographed you well." In rage, the uncle smashed the old man's skull. While the old man was unconscious, the young woman punctured both of his eyes identically, aiming precisely at the centre of the Iris with a sharp instrument – probably a pin – with the precision of a surgeon, or a dressmaker. The irrepressible fear of being recognised motivated her terrible gesture.

Agnès kept all the press photos connected to the event and put all the family photos representing her uncle aside in a box. She confessed to me that she still has the box in her possession, although she has not opened it in many years.

I then picked the black pen again and erased a few more words from the projected text. I then sat down on a chair next to Cally Spooner who began an interview.

(Cally) How do you feel about being the human vessels for other people's things?

(Vanessa) I feel about it. In a way, there is even a form of desire to be the vessel of someone else's work. And be the support, see my work differently. I'm fine with it.

How does it feel carrying other people's content in your work?

It feels like... it brings questions. It questions the way I follow what people want me to, how they want me to carry their content. It questions me in relation to how faithful I am in relation to their content. Also it questions me about how much freedom I have and the space I have in relation to that injunction.

So it makes you feel...

It makes me feel curious and ambiguous in regards to why I do that, why I perform that.

Do you feel you have a relationship to an actor?

No, I don't think so.

I wanted to think about what Richard Sennett said that the only people who understand how to conduct public life is the actor, they can bring some distance but they don't bring their emotions to the table which makes them superb citizens. So I wanted to ask you about your ability to distance yourself from your emotions as an actor/curator, which I know is very different from the traditional actor.

It's not very clear for how much emotion I bring, in carrying people's things, how emotion that involves. At least for a long time I did not question that emotional aspect. Putting distance with one's emotions is something I learn later actually in life being a mother and I think that experience has made me think about putting distance and using emotion differently in my work.

Due to your power to carry other people's things, is it possible for you to live anything that anybody wants at any time? An artist I mean.

Do you mean can I be an artist?

No I mean, can you be anything an artist wants you to be?

Yes. No I think, yes I can. At least that's something I've always thought was possible. I'm trying to think of examples. I've had some challenges in relation to what an artist had wanted me to be. The example I can think of is Santiago Sierra when he asked me to find homeless people for a performance work. That was a challenge but I did it. I can't say I did not think about it but I "achieved".

As we know in the contemporary world, it is often necessary to be highly performative in all sorts of ways: we have to be charming, we have to be nice to our boss, we have to put on a show. How does that relate to curating?

In a simple way, curating, the world of curating, in many ways demand that you're charming, very sociable, and to understand art as a kind of social life that it creates and depends on. So in that way it's very similar to most professional areas.

Do you think we are all curators in this way?

No.

What does it mean to you to be "off script"?

It means when you loose control of a situation.

Would you be able to say if it's an aesthetic space or an existential space or an emotional space?

Off script... I would say it's a political space in a sense that when you go off script on a volunteer basis that can be done for political reason; I think it can be an emotional space if it is based on an emotional reason.

How does it make you feel to find yourself in that space?

It feels empowering at times and political in that sense; from the emotional perspective it feels frightening when something of yourself is not in your control anymore. However I think these experiences are important and there is much to learn from them.

As you work more and more as a professional curator do you feel more divorced from your body?

No I think it's the contrary.

What are your future projects?

I'm working on two books for other artists and I'm beginning anew research project that has to do with a question of care in medical contexts, and it's the very beginning so it's not clear yet.

What do you understand care to be? It's my last question.

I understand care as taking the responsibility for someone when they are not able to so, as providing support and help to someone for reasons as different as friendship, love, or based on other forms of relationships. And I understand care as protecting, forms of protection that are connected to the 2 situations I describe.

Why am I here?

You are here because for the last 6 years I've been working on this PhD project our conversations have been very challenging and although I don't think our interests and research don't always overlap. The way you use other people's work in your work has interested me in my curatorial practice. And you are here because there was this desire to rely on other people and in a way reverse the situation in a slightly perverse way in a sense that you would carry part of my examination as much as I carried your work at other times in the past.

The interview ended.

I told the examiners that this was the end of the presentation and they left the room in order to proceed to their deliberations.

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Jean-Pascal Flavien chose to give no specific instructions to Lola and I chose to stay outside the room when Lola was talking. I can now see in both decisions how much the act of withdrawing was central to this project. I can now assess that the idea of withdrawing did not come directly from me, but rather that it had been central to my experience of previously working with specific artists, and Flavien in particular. Flavien had withdrawn from his own work at different occasions, passing it on to other people so they could inhabit it, transform, and institute it in ways that he, as artist, would not have anticipated. When I invited him to come to Maastricht and work with me, he did not hesitate to move out the furniture of *no drama house* and temporarily install it in Matt Mullican's exhibition at Hedah in order to perform *PLAY*, a performance consisting in arranging furniture and texts. Ideas of displacement, translation and transposition are fundamental to Flavien's work, and they consequently appear anew in his contribution to the event at Goldsmiths with the placing of an architectural model of *folding house* on the wall and with Lola travelling from Nice to London in order to speak in place of the house. My experience of Flavien's act of withdrawal in order to place other people in his works has played a crucial role in the transformations that my curatorial practice undertook during the development of my PhD project. In a letter addressed to the artist in the context of a publication on his *breathing house* project, I wrote:

I thought it was a great opportunity to live in one of your houses. I thought "great" because it was opening up a situation where I could really confront myself with the possibility of acting directly on the work (*acting* rather than thinking, interpreting, reading, representing...) following the demand of the artist himself. But once there, I believe I suddenly measured that work and life follow different temporal and spatial tracks. I needed to differentiate between spaces and times, a time for work and a time for life, a space for life and a space for work. So I tried. But *breathing house* would not easily allow for such differentiation and difference, in the same way as I think you resist the opposition between our individual roles. Maybe I should have set some rules for our game and ask you: Can I play the curator? I don't know how to play any other role.³³⁷

The time spent in Flavien's *breathing house* allowed me to articulate a problem that I was confronted with in experiencing his work in that way, it was the difficulty to distinguish between life and work, between an intellectual project and an existential one. The collapse of these two projects into one was a crucial event in the context of my curatorial practice. I

³³⁷ Vanessa Desclaux, "Dear F", in Jean-Pascal Flavien, *breathing house*, Devonian Press, 2012

analysed the situation that Flavien invited me in as a form of relationship between artist and curator that allowed for a proliferation of roles and places for both. It did not negate the difference between each other's position, but it refused to make these positions affixed. In Flavien's proposition for the event at Goldsmiths, yet another set of positions were experimented: both artist and curator stepped back, withdrew, letting Lola, the first inhabitant of the house, speak of a place that did not yet exist. "Place" here has a double meaning: it can designate a physical or geographical position as much as a role or function. Our withdrawal was spatial as much as functional. I only became aware of this redistribution of places as the event took place, and after I looked at the documentation. Through his proposition, Flavien did not allow me to embody the figure of the inhabitant and allowed me to withdraw even further than what I had suggested in my invitation. I had offered to let go of the authority and decision-making invested in the professional status of the curator; he demanded that I also let go of my agency as possible inhabitant. In that way we both appear subsumed in a form of dispossession, allowing a third person to act under the conditions we set up.

When I talked to Agnès Geoffray upon my return to Paris, I realized that I had made a mistake in the way I understood her instructions for the works to be shown at Goldsmiths. She had imagined that I would erase the words directly on the transparent sheet used to project the text. Instead I attempted to erase the words projected on the wall, crossing the light of the projection with my body, and encountering much more difficulty to cover the surface of the written text with a tool chosen by the artist to work on a different scale. Before the examination, I had imagined that these two works by Agnès Geoffray would materialize as things I could go back to during the time of the event. I thought of both of these propositions as gestures that should not be too formal; they required some fluidity, and modesty in their realization. I failed to make these gestures informal and discreet. The formal dimension of the examination took over and I did not manage to loosen my own posture in regard to the context. For example, I badly recited the storyline instead of embodying it as I hoped to do. This failure in embodying the story made manifest the situation of exposition that I was placed in through Agnès Geoffray's contribution. Agnès Geoffray asked me to tell a story that she almost entirely invented. The physical violence at the core of the story echoed in my view the alteration at the heart of the curatorial act, which might call on interpretation, awarding of meaning, and transposition into a different context. In an exhibition, or in an event implicating the presentation of a work of art, the work is displayed and exposed. Through her contribution, Geoffray placed me as a curator in a similar position as the work: we could no

longer distinguish my own performance from the work; the performance was integral to the work itself. My feeling of failure in regard to the performance consequently implicates my responsibility as a curator. At the onset of the project, I had suggested to the invited artists that I had a desire to withdraw, and to test passivity as a particular mode of curatorial practice. Geoffray did not oppose frontally my proposition, yet her contribution positioned in return my responsibility in a different place, at the level of the transmission of the work, through speech and performance. Through both of her propositions, Geoffray placed my own body on the front line, demanding me to engage with her works in a physical way, allowing me to appropriate them, and transform them, whilst also forcing me into their frame of visibility. She negates the possibility of a neutral position: her contributions emphasize that passivity cannot be considered as a position of neutrality and cannot be confused with inactivity. Passivity can only be understood here in the context of a situation shared by different subjects that implicates movements of withdrawal, of suspension of decision-making, and of making oneself available for an experience to which one has not yet ascribed meaning.

Both Agnès Geoffray and I have found in the status and lived experience of women in the past a resonance with our present time and conditions of existence. Our shared interest in the experiences of the mystics, experiences of so-called “possession”, and physical phenomena such as convulsions, points toward a common inquiry into processes of construction and deconstruction of subjectivity, and into the resistance to patriarchal forms of domination. The extract of text selected by Geoffray intentionally brought forward this point of questioning in my PhD thesis. Her request regarding my intervention on the text placed me in direct contact with these stories of possession and empowered me with the capacity to transform the original law forbidding the physical manifestations of women’s suffering and wilful resistance to the patriarchal order imposed upon them. The emphasis placed upon these public acts of convulsion through Geoffray’s selection of text was reiterated by my own act of erasing and rewriting: it tried to reverse the patriarchal narrative, privileging what in oneself cannot remain in control, what inevitably escapes, disobeys and resists: it emphasizes that so-called states of “possession” are considered improper because they put the light on something that cannot be controlled or mastered in the subject.³³⁸ In both of Geoffray’s contributions, we can

³³⁸ Through my attempt at arguing the relevance of passivity in the context of the political transformation of curatorial practice, I tried to make a connexion between passivity and resistance to a variety of injunctions telling people how to behave in order to successfully adjust to our present social, economic and political conditions. I thus thought that passivity did not mean not to act at all, but rather not to act in the way the economic, social and

observe the central role of transmission; something is passed on from artist to curator, from woman to woman, across the distance of history and across physical distance. In both works, Geoffray plays with an essential confusion: an impossibility of separating what is of oneself and what is of the other; she demands that as a curator I perform an act of appropriation, that I make her biography, the story she invented, the text she selected, my own. Her contributions therefore aimed at moving both her work and mine toward a form of misidentification, a proliferation of identities, real and fictional, and a multiplication of roles and competencies. The fact that I made “mistakes” reveals that this process of transmission does not obey the format prescribed by professional regimes of competency.

In Yael Davids’s contribution to the event at Goldsmiths, she carried out a performance that came out of her encounter and concern with two main bodies of work: on the one hand, the work of Israeli choreographer Noa Eshkol who was very influential on Davids’s mother’s own work; on the other hand, the work of Moshé Feldenkrais, who contributed a new method and practice of movement. Eshkol and Feldenkrais were friends and collaborators. Yael Davids has practiced the Feldenkrais method for over ten years and she began a 4-year training to be able to teach Feldenkrais a year ago. In our recent discussion about the event in London, Davids and I talked about the fact that we went into the performance without having really discussed what her performance was about, and without any training, or sense of the status of competencies to be traded. We later talked about a form of meeting at the edge of each other’s project, of diving into a performance without much notice or preparation. Although her demand on me to play the flute, for which I felt completely unprepared and incompetent, made me feel anxious, I also acknowledged that in the moment of the performance, the concentration I had to deploy help me forget the stress of the examination itself. I was moved by the physical contact that occurred during the performance. Yael Davids told me that she felt very moved too, not by the event itself, but rather by the risk I was taking. She related to my position as a form of effacement of my person in the project, in the action of the project, transforming myself into a form of abstraction. She referred to a specific text by Susan Sontag on Robert Bresson’s film *Pickpocket*.

In *Pickpocket*, the emotional center of the film is where Michel is wordlessly, disinterestedly, taken in hand by a professional pickpocket and initiated into the real

political system demanded. Passivity allows a form of wilfulness, of disobedience, and resistance to sanctioned modes of action and of behaviour. Sarah Ahmed writes: “One form of will seems to involve the rendering of other wills as willful; one form of will assumes the right to eliminate the others.” (Sara Ahmed, *Willful subjects*, London: Duke University Press, 2014, 2)

art of what he has only practiced desultorily: difficult gestures are demonstrated, the necessity of repetition and routine is made clear. Large sections, of *Un Condamné à Mort s'est Échappé* and *Pickpocket* are wordless; they are about the beauties of personality effaced by a project. ...

While the spiritual style of Cocteau's heroes (who are played, usually, by Jean Marais) tends toward narcissism, the spiritual style of Bresson's heroes is one variety or other of unself-consciousness. (Hence the role of the project in Bresson's films: it absorbs the energies that would otherwise be spent on the self. It effaces personality, in the sense of personality as what is idiosyncratic in each human being, the limit inside which we are locked.) Consciousness of self is the "gravity" that burdens the spirit; the surpassing of the consciousness of self is "grace," or spiritual lightness.³³⁹

Through her reference to Sontag Yael Davids emphasizes an important aspect of the concept of passivity in relation to forms of practice that involve repetitive, difficult and necessary gestures. The routine of certain type of gestures, of tasks is something that I have often thought about in relation to curatorial practice. I think that there is something particularly important in acknowledging a dimension of curatorial practice that is very foreign to theory and to the production of meaning but is rather anchored in the achievement of humdrum tasks as well as complex administrative procedures – such as loans, contracts etc. –, or practical decisions and physical actions that have to do with dealing with space and architecture in relation to the setting up of an exhibition. Evidently there is nothing passive in these practical, physical or administrative tasks characteristic of curatorial practice, unless we shift our attention to what these difficult or repetitive type of actions take us away from in relation to another sort of responsibility carried by the curator, which has to do with making sense, providing meaning and taking charge of signification.

Bresson is interested in the forms of spiritual action—in the physics, as it were, rather than in the psychology of souls. Why persons behave as they do is, ultimately, not to be understood. (Psychology, precisely, does claim to understand.) Above all, persuasion is inexplicable, unpredictable. That the priest does reach the proud and unyielding Countess (in *Le Journal d'un Curé de Campagne*), that Jeanne doesn't persuade Michel (in *Pickpocket*) are just facts—or mysteries, if you like. Such a physics of the soul was the subject of Simone Weil's most remarkable book, *Gravity*

³³⁹ Susan Sontag, "Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson", in *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays*, London: Penguin, 2009

and Grace. And the following sentences of Simone Weil's — "All the natural movements of the soul are controlled by laws analogous to those of physical gravity. Grace is the only exception. Grace fills empty spaces, but it can only enter where there is a void to receive it, and it is grace itself which makes this void. The imagination is continually at work filling up all the fissures through which grace might pass." — supply the three basic theorems of Bresson's "anthropology." Some souls are heavy, others light; some are liberated or capable of being liberated, others not. All one can do is be patient, and as empty as possible. In such a regimen there is no place for the imagination, much less for ideas and opinions. The ideal is neutrality, transparency.³⁴⁰

In her contribution, Davids not only asked me to play the flute, she also positioned me in a specific relation to her body and to the ground. She made me experience with her a position of horizontality. This horizontality allowed another dimension of passivity to emerge in a sense that lying on the ground helped experience a different form of situatedness; it provided a new state of equilibrium that called on an essential undoing of hierarchies, beginning with the relation between artist and curator. Both the artist and I were incorporated under the project of the performance, perhaps to the detriment of address, legibility, communication, and thus examination. In the event at Goldsmiths, both Yael Davids and Agnès Geoffray's contributions emphasized the complicity of the artists in intervening in the work to the point of altering it (considering that playing the flute for Yael Davids simultaneously made the performance possible but altered it as well). Both artists showed a shared desire for twisting the reality of one's life, scavenging one's own life for things to bring into art. These aspects of their contributions resonate with the concept of fabulation that I discussed in my thesis. In fabulation, there is an assumption of appropriating, perhaps even stealing, and of the possibility of misinterpretation, lie and betrayal, which allow to acknowledge the symbolic violence at work in the relationship between artistic and curatorial practices.

At the end of the interview Cally Spooner asked "Why am I here?" and I thought it was such a relevant question, a question that framed the issue of her presence in that project very differently than if she had asked "Why did you choose me?". Her presence partly related to my invitation in a sense that I invited Cally Spooner to contribute to the presentation of my practice for the examination, but the choice for the artist to appear there in person was hers. Her contribution displayed an essential ambiguity that only her physical presence could

³⁴⁰ Susan Sontag, "Spiritual Style in the Films of Robert Bresson", in *Against Interpretation: And Other Essays*, London: Penguin, 2009

sustain. Cally Spooner literally revealed the thin line that one could draw, and cross, between a performance in an artistic context and the examination process as such. Spooner toys with the format of the exam; she stands in before the examiners, asking her questions first. Her intervention, which consisted in using a set of questions for a fictional interview with actor and producer Kevin Spacey, was provocative despite its visible lightness. Cally Spooner used a character template that she projected onto my role of curator. Through this template, she made a parallel between the figure of the curator and the figure of the film actor. Her gesture was in that sense similar to the way she had previously adapted her *Stage directions for a public speaker* in the context of my lecture titled “A stuttering exhibition”. Through her interview template, Cally Spooner addressed issues of outsourcing, of a “performance of language that can never be our own, but which speaks on our behalf”³⁴¹. My interest in stuttering tried to reflect on this relationship to language, and the possibility to produce one’s own voice through the affirmation of dysfunctional (repetitive, discontinuous, disarticulated) forms of speech. Through her interview, Spooner questions how far one can go in embodying someone else’s work, making someone else’s content our own. Her question addresses the production of subjectivity in this context. What kind of subject is produced? My thesis is concerned with similar questions in the specific field of curatorial practice. My own position as a curator has been informed by an investigation of the production of subjectivity within a field of work that demand to carry other people’s work. However through my thesis I have tried to explore the possibilities to fulfil this task without renouncing to the affirmation of my own voice. The challenge has been to make a distinction between two different forms of the effacement of the self, which I discussed in my thesis through two distinct forms of dispossession: on the one hand, one form of dispossession is forced upon the subject by an entire system of norms that imposes its own protocols, tools, postures and regimes of communication; on the other hand, another form of dispossession is looked-for by the subject in order to make oneself available for certain relationships and experiences. This second form of dispossession is characterized by its risk-taking position: one attempts to venture into not yet known experiences and territories.

In the presentation of my practice for the PhD examination, I attempted to perform this second form of dispossession, which is a position of passivity. Passivity does not mean here that one is not conscious, or incapacitated. I consider passivity as a theoretical tool to consider

³⁴¹ Cally Spooner, *On false tears and outsourcing* (2016). Lecture written by the artist to be performed by an outsourced speaker.

anew the ethics of curatorial practice in order to envisage a way of working and existing in relation to artists that privilege the capacity for each party to stay mobile in relation to one's place and one's role.

... passivity is possible if "being conscious" is not "giving meaning", which one has in his or her possession, to an ungraspable matter of knowledge, but to achieve a certain gap, a certain variant in an already instituted field of existence, that is always behind us, and whose weight, like the weight of a wheel, intervenes even in the actions through which we transform ourselves. Living, for a human being, is not only perpetually imposing significations, but maintaining a turmoil of experience that has been formed, with our birth, at the point of contact between the "outside" and the one who is called upon to live it.³⁴²

Merleau-Ponty makes a distinction between "being conscious" and "giving meaning", suggesting that passivity can be defined as a state of consciousness, and a state of action that tries to suspend the injunction to ascribe meaning. Merleau-Ponty thus calls on a possibility of existing, of acting in the world liberated from the production of signification. I understand this possibility, and I thus understand passivity as a position of suspension: not inaction, inactivity or immobility. With passivity as a state of suspension, of dispossession, of withdrawal, and of slowing down, I declare a desire to work against injunctions of production, productivity, efficiency and autonomy proper to our present overstretching working conditions. Passivity on the contrary allows for the creation of duration, an expansion of the time of observation, of exchange with others; it makes time for a different form of construction, of writing, of communication, and thus it makes it possible to be thoughtful, to hesitate and ponder, and to make decision differently.

The first ethical virtue of an ethics of passivity is courage, but not courage understood as the bravery to execute already formulated tasks, but rather the courage to face our situatedness as something dynamic, as something inherently calling upon us to learn and adapt, to change ourselves and effect changes in situations.³⁴³

The context of the PhD examination required questioning its nature as a specific institutional

³⁴² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution La passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, Paris : Belin, 2015, 353–54, my translation.

³⁴³ Donald Jack Beith, *Passivity in the Philosophy of Merleau-Ponty*, A thesis submitted to McGill University, 2012. Last accessed 27 June 2016. URL: http://digitool.library.mcgill.ca/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=0&dvs=1468400044254~569

situation. The project I carried out with Agnès Geoffray, Jean-Pascal Flavien, Cally Spooner and Yael Davids attempted to respond to this specific situation, characterised by its pedagogical dimension, its privacy — it is not addressed to a broader audience —, its lack of financial and technical means. I attempted to propose a form of presentation that could allow fundamental dimensions of my practice to be staged. Passivity – with spectatorship and fabulation – has provided me with an essential tool in practice and in theory in order to profoundly rethink how to trust and rely on others, and work with others within the current conditions available for curators to carry out their practice. However, the relationship to passivity that I attempted to articulate in writing and in practice is not envisaged as an end in itself, and it cannot be the object of a statement that would affirm, “I am passive”. The form of passivity that I have been working with is neither passive nor active; it cannot be fixed. Passivity is a means to situate oneself in relation to experience; it is a mode of practice that allows positioning oneself in tension with a set of professional *and* academic expectations in regard to individual production and authorship.

CONCLUSION

In the context of my research project, I proposed to investigate the fiction that is currently available in regards to the figure of the curator, looking at existing models of curatorial practice in order to bring forth absences, complexities and contestations and therefore situate curatorial practice as a site of conflict and dissent. In the first chapter of my thesis, I took my working experience at Tate Modern as a point of departure. Considering the context of this institution as a reference for defining an ensemble of professional expectations that are shared by an entire profession, I set up a series of scholarly positions that helped me defining the scope of existing academic discourses in the context of curating. I paid particular attention to the discursive shift that occurred through the emergence of the term “curatorial”, which allowed rethinking the inscription of curating within a network of professional and academic practices, calling on different disciplines and knowledges, and introducing complexity in the relationship between the different objects and subjects involved. I introduced the notion of spectatorship, inquiring into the relationship between the figure of the spectator and the figure of the curator. The contestations regarding the notion of spectatorship, and particularly the problematic opposition between spectatorship and participation in the context of contemporary art, provided an important framework within which I could question a set of assumptions regarding the value assigned to activity, participation, and production. I attempted to claim that spectatorship played a fundamental role in curatorial practice, expanding spectatorship through notions of vision, attention, and speculation. In this first chapter I reclaimed the notion of spectatorship, which has appeared undermined in various cultural fields in favour of a notion of participation that epitomized the influence of neo-liberal rhetoric, stipulating the importance of individual action and autonomy. Such an appropriation of the notion of spectatorship in the context of curatorial practice constituted a first step towards a questioning of the relationship between the figure of the curator and the notion of subject.

In the second chapter, I suggested that curatorial practices were confronted with conventional approaches that insufficiently addressed and challenged the disciplining discourses and ideological constructions upon which professional standards and habits are based. I suggested that the professional expectations inherent to curatorial practice were aligned with neo-liberal rhetoric in this sense also, placing an emphasis on the approach of authorship in curatorial

practice, which does not differentiate itself from the way the broader field of business considers authorship in relation to property and value production. In reaction to this context, I proposed to mobilize the concept of passivity, reassessing the scope of its possible significations, and putting it to use in the framework of curatorial practice in order to disrupt discourses and professional standards. I looked for different forms of mobilization of passivity across a broad range of disciplines and practices, including hypnosis, mystique, or historiography, artistic practice, and curatorial practice. I addressed different forms of passivity through which contradictions emerged, and I tried to make a distinction between forms of passivity that are commonly available, but need to be differently granted value, while other forms of passivity needed to be invested and reclaimed, calling on crucial political agency. These political forms of passivity allowed me to unsettle both identity and authority and acknowledge positions of resistance in regards to the norms that determine professional models and behaviours, and exclude or marginalize others. Through an appropriation of passivity, I acknowledged the importance of dependence, debt, and dispossession in the context of curatorial practice, positioning passivity as a critical tool to rethink the ethics of curatorial practice.

In the third chapter, I proposed to explore the current acts of subjection through which the figure of the curator establishes itself as a subject, and to imagine a different paradigm for the production of value and of subjectivity in this context. Following the affirmation of a possibility of resistance to neo-liberalism through a reclaiming of passivity, I suggested that one could envisage the possibility of upholding a vital position of inhabitation of curatorial practice. Made available thanks to spectatorship and passivity, I claimed that these new forms of inhabitation of curatorial practice couldn't stay within the limits assigned through usual professional recommendations. In this chapter, I challenged the workings of curatorial authorship, looking at a proliferation of forms of curatorial enunciations, through which the mobilization of the first person allows for multiple ways of situating oneself. I invested the term of fabulation as it provided me with the opportunity to further disrupt an ensemble of professional standards regarding communication, signification and expertise. However, I tried to face the necessity to challenge a set of terms that could easily align themselves with neo-liberal rhetoric regarding flexibility, mobility and creativity in the context of the production of subjectivity. Concepts of anthropophagy and plasticity helped me to reflect on the paradox and contradictions that emerge when calling upon spectatorship, passivity and fabulation in

order to promote forms of transformation and care of the self, and on the necessity to define politically one's position in regards to the production of subjectivity.

My curatorial practice transformed over the period of six years during which I developed my academic practice in the context of the PhD. I let go of my position of assistant curator at Tate Modern and gradually built up new approaches for working with artists. Stepping outside of institutional frameworks, I started to question what my professional identity as a curator relied on. As I inserted myself in different working frameworks such as the Jan van Eyck academie in Maastricht, the programme of "Research in Residence" of If I Can't Dance I Don't Want To Be Part Of Your Revolution in Amsterdam, the production of a work by artist Marc Camille Chaimowicz on Jean Genet, or the inhabitation of Jean-Pascal Flavien's *breathing house* in the context of his exhibition at Parc Saint Léger, I began to reflect on a form of inversion: I was no longer on the side of the institution creating frameworks within which artists could be invited, I was rather inviting myself in projects led by artists, or making myself available to share artistic experiences, keeping an open-mind regarding the role I could fulfil in these different contexts. I would say that one of the most striking elements that I took from these different experiences, which I tried to introduce in my thesis, was the idea of being moved away from a determined professional function. This form of voluntary dispossession of one's professional identity allowed a different construction of subjectivity to emerge in relation to my professional expectations. I experienced a field of practice that expanded and enriched itself from a set of possibilities that were not available before.

In the project proposed in order to present my curatorial practice in the context of the viva examination, which is examined in the final chapter, I made the decision to invite four artists that had played an important role in these six years of redefinition of my curatorial practice. My desire was to set up a framework within which new discussions with them could take place, and where their different practices could meet. I wanted to make as little decision as possible regarding what they could propose in the context of my viva examination in order to disrupt the academic context within which, as a researcher, I was expected to take the overall responsibility for the practice. Such a context also allowed blurring the boundary between the professional and academic frameworks in which the examination was inscribed, and the personal and affective relationships that connected me to the invited artists.

One of the fundamental questions that my situation and experience as an "independent" curator and academic researcher in the last few years have urged me to deal with is the issue

of individual responsibility. Since 2009, my curatorial practice has fallen under the definition of freelance work, or *auto-entreprise* in the context of French administration. This situation, and the conditions that it implies, has exacerbated the relationship between the figure of the curator and the figures of the manager or the entrepreneur, which are also relevant within the context of institutions. Some aspects of passivity are readily available in the context of curatorial practice indifferently of contexts and situations: repetitive gestures, administrative tasks related to the different aspects of the running of an institution or the organisation of an exhibition; the observation, contemplation of artists' works, and exhibitions; time dedicated to reading, watching films etc. Many day-to-day aspects of curatorial practice can be discussed through forms of passivity. However, other, more political forms of passivity are not readily available in the context of curatorial practice and necessitate to position ourselves in contradiction with different professional (or academic) injunctions, calling on a profound rethinking of our labouring conditions. In the context of my project, I claimed that a political position regarding passivity allows for a suspension of an all-encompassing ascription of meaning. It makes it possible to refute a rigid distribution of roles and places, and antagonises different regimes of verification central to the functioning of the market economy extended to all social fields.

When I joined the Goldsmiths Research department in Art in 2009, I knew that the project I wanted to pursue was shaped by a reaction against the professional context I had experienced at Tate Modern, and in the broader framework of professional practice. Yet I sincerely thought that the political expression that this reaction would take was the simple move to academic practice, which I initially considered as a form of withdrawal. I did not expect my research project itself to take on this trajectory of imagining anew what an approach of curatorial practice could be as a professional practice. It is clear to me today that the journey I undertook in defining my project within the PhD context, as well as the transformation of my curatorial practice in that timeframe both concomitantly contributed to shaping the project of this overall PhD thesis. Today I can claim that my project has been motivated by two expectations: on the one hand, the desire to contribute with dedication and depth to the scholarly field of curating; on the other hand, the will to propose a perspective on curatorial practice that argued for a humility of approach and an ethics of practice that paid more attention to its political responsibility in its capacity to resist to a proliferation of neo-liberal injunctions. I am not sure both trajectories can be followed so closely. This was the project for this thesis; I will take on the next journey differently.

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APPENDIX 1

LIST OF ORIGINAL QUOTES IN FRENCH LANGUAGE

I have translated quotes from French to English when no official translation of these texts was available.

In order of appearance in the text:

P 11

Michel Foucault, *La Grande Etrangère. A propos de littérature*, ed. Philippe Artières, Jean-François Bert, Mathieu Potte-Bonneville and Judith Revel (Paris: les éditions de l'EHESS, 2013), 107

‘Il se forme, de nos jours, un rapport très différent, entre le langage que l’on peut appeler premier, et que nous appelons plus simplement littérature, et ce langage second, qui parle de littérature, et que l’on appelle d’ordinaire critique.’

P 48

Christian Ruby, *La figure du spectateur, Eléments d'histoire culturelle européenne*, (Paris: Amand Colin, 2012), 67, 69

‘Un jugement qui concrétise la rencontre émotionnelle entre un exercice de la sensibilité et un objet en portant le sujet vers la connaissance critique.’ (p 67)

‘En un mot, le spectateur est apprentissage, variabilité et multiplicité.’ (p 69)

P 53

Christophe Kihm, *Le spectateur expérimenté*, in *In Actu. De l'expérimental dans l'art*, ed. Elie During, Laurent Jeanpierre, Christophe Kihm, Dork Zabunyan (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 2009), 349, 350, 351

‘La mesure de la distance, propre à la définition de la compétence du spectateur dans l’art critique est reportée dans la capacité de réponse du participant dans le dispositif interactif de l’esthétique relationnelle et de la relation comme forme.’ (p 349)

‘Le spectateur est donc saisi entre deux feux : d’un côté, il n’expérimenterait jamais (puisque’il est inexpérimenté), de l’autre, il expérimenterait toujours (puisque’il est expérimentable).’ (p 350)

‘Que serait donc, pour le spectateur, une expérimentation qui ne répondrait plus aux impératifs de l’action effective posée par un processus de réalisation, ni aux actualisations potentielles de données programmées par un dispositif technique, ni encore aux jeux symboliques de la distribution des rôles et des places ?’ (p 351)

P 57

Christophe Kihm, *Le spectateur expérimenté*, *In Actu. De l'expérimental dans l'art*, 339

‘Le spectateur compétent et le spectateur incompétent partagent ainsi la même place et la même situation dans l’espace, mais de l’un à l’autre, s’affirme une différence de capacité de décryptage des signes.’ (p 339)

P 61

Michel de Certeau ‘La folie de la vision’, *Esprit* (juin 1982): 92

‘Cette philosophie ne domine donc pas son objet. Elle lui est intérieure. Elle est captée par ce dont elle parle. Comme la vision du peintre, elle est « regardée » par ce qu’elle considère. Son style n’est pas celui des jeux brillants ironiques et autoritaires d’une autonomie ; c’est le jeu érotique d’une passion dont l’objet vient mais ne se possède pas.’

P 73

François Roustang, *Qu’est ce que l’hypnose ?* (Paris: les éditions de Minuit, 1994), 11

‘C’est un quatrième état de l’organisme, actuellement non objectivable (à l’inverse des trois autres : veille, sommeil, rêve) : une sorte de potentialité naturelle, de dispositif inné prenant ses racines jusque dans l’hypnose animale, caractérisé par des traits qui renvoient apparemment aux relations pré-langagières d’attachement de l’enfant et se produisant dans des situations où l’individu est perturbé dans ses relations à l’environnement.’

Léon Chertok, *L’Hypnose* (Paris: Petite Bibliothèque Payot, 1965), 81, 91

‘Ainsi l’hypnosabilité dépend de « la facilité avec laquelle un individu peut intérioriser un stimulus externe et en faire une part de lui-même ».’ (p 81)

‘L’hypnose est une relation dans laquelle deux personnalités se rencontrent et jouent l’une par rapport à l’autre un rôle complémentaire. Ainsi l’hypnosabilité dépend des multiples rapports inter-et intrapersonnels mis en œuvre.’ (p 91)

P 74

François Roustang, *Qu’est ce que l’hypnose ?* (Paris: les éditions de Minuit, 1994), 10

‘L’hypnose ... n’étudie pas non plus le sujet humain en lui-même, dans ce que nous avons appelé son psychisme, car elle ne saisit la personne que dans son environnement, que dans et par le rapport à son monde ; elle n’est donc pas plus subjective qu’objective, pas plus individuelle que collective.’

Léon Chertok, Isabelle Stengers, *Hypnose, blessure narcissique* (Paris: Institut Synthelabo, 1999), 41

‘Il est personnellement engagé, comme l’hypnotiseur, dans une histoire dont l’enjeu n’est pas la, production d’une vérité, mais la production de nouvelles expériences affectives pour son patient.’

P 76

Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Identité et tremblement', in *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 43

'La passivité n'est pas individuelle : on peut être actif seul, mais on ne peut être passif qu'à deux ou plusieurs. La passivité est, de l'individu, ce qui tremble et s'écarte de lui, l'écartant de soi, l'espaçant d'un battement.'

Michael Borch-Jacobsen, Eric Michaud and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 10, 11

'Nous parlons d'une limite : une limite de la conscience, du rapport, de l'individualité, du pouvoir, de la pathologie, etc.' (p 10)

'Nous interrogeons seulement ce qui, de la passivité, ou d'une passion plus « archaïque » encore que celle qui est en jeu dans le couple actif/passif, affleure autant dans le procès verbal de l'analyse que dans le discours de la philosophie, dans l'épreuve de la pensée, dans l'expérience de la singularité et de la communauté.' (p 11)

P 77

Michael Borch-Jacobsen, Eric Michaud and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 10

'C'est que dans « l'hypnose », il s'agit d'une démultiplication ou d'une dissociation: de l'identité, de l'activité, de la propriété, ou encore du désir, de la volonté, de la présence...'

P 78

Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Identité et tremblement', in *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 17, 18, 19, 25

'Le *pluriel* véritable est exclu par principe. Le chemin de la conscience-de-soi peut bien passer par le désir et par la reconnaissance de l'autre, il est d'avance tracé comme le processus circulaire du Soi de cette conscience.' (p 17)

'Il faut entendre ce que veut dire A. Ce n'est pas un symbole logique, c'est l'initiale de toute initiale : c'est un nom propre, un visage, une voix. Ce n'est pas proprement un individu, puisqu'il est divisé par son égalité et par la différence de cette égalité, mais c'est une singularité.' (p 18)

'Le sujet a en lui sa différence à soi.' (p 18)

'Immortel, inengendré, et insomniaque : c'est la triple négation sur laquelle s'enlève la vie de l'esprit, imperturbablement adulte et éveillé.' (p 19)

'Ou bien encore : d'où peut venir une identité *différente* ? D'où B peut-il venir à A ? Ou encore : qu'est-ce qui peut faire trembler A ?' (p 18)

‘Elle est simplement ce partage d’une simple intériorité : elle est l’éveil qui a lieu dans le sommeil même, ou bien elle est le sommeil lui-même, ce « retour à l’essence universelle de la subjectivité », *en tant qu’individu*. A dort en étant A lui-même, qui est pour soi tout en dormant. Cela s’appelle l’hypnose.’ (p 25)

‘Mais la passivité ne saurait être « simple » : elle ne peut pas être déterminée comme une « puissance » de recevoir et d’être affecté ; elle ne peut l’être que dans le fait même d’être affecté.’ (p 25)

p 79

Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Identité et tremblement’, in *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 26, 30, 31, 39, 43

‘Le sentiment ne *me* fait sujet, il fait l’âme une affection totale, pour elle-même, mais seulement sur le mode du “à elle-même”. Le *même* de l’âme affective est ce même endormi qui se confond, parce qu’il ne s’en est jamais distingué, n’ayant jamais *été*, avec la totalité de l’autre qui l’affecte. Aussi ne connaît-il ni l’extérieur comme tel, ni la limitation.’ (p 26)

‘L’*état* de la passivité offre ce caractère remarquable de ne plus être, ou d’être à peine, à la limite seulement, un état *du* sujet.’ (p 30)

‘S’il est ainsi présence, c’est comme une pure présence, qui n’a pas pour soi de présent et ne se présente ni représente rien, seulement offerte à la représentation de l’autre.’ (p 31)

‘La passivité n’ « est » en fait que cela : qu’il lui arrive quelque chose, d’ailleurs, de l’autre. Qu’il lui arrive du différent. La passivité n’est pas la propriété d’être passif, et par exemple de se laisser donner ou imprimer telle ou telle marque. La passivité ne fait rien, pas même sur ce mode du « faire » que serait encore de se laisser faire.’ (p 39)

P 80

Jean-Luc Nancy, ‘Identité et tremblement’, in *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 30

‘Mais cela signifie que la spéculation philosophique sur la « pathologie », et la détermination générale de l’être-affecté comme « pathologie » dépend directement de la pensée de la liberté comme pure auto-position et comme pure auto-production de la conscience vigile.’

P 81

Michael Borch-Jacobsen, Eric Michaud and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 11

‘Ce qu’elle met en jeu, on le verra, est de la passion, voire « la première de toutes les passions », ou la passivité. Mais on ne peut, sans doute, jamais dire *la* passivité. Ce n’est pas une propriété, la passivité est impropre et accidentelle — proprement et par essence.’

Note: In the process of translating this quote, I was confronted with a difficulty: in French, Nancy places an emphasis on passivity as a single noun, ‘la passivité’; whereas in English, passivity cannot be preceded by the determinative “the”.

Léon Chertok, Isabelle Stengers, *Hypnose, blessure narcissique* (Paris: Institut Synthelabo, 1999), 3, 7, 8

‘La singularité de l’hypnose est alors qu’il s’agit moins d’un fait « en attente de théorie » qu’un fait mettant en question la position de « jugement sur la réalité » qu’une théorie vise à instituer.’ (p 3)

‘C’est pourquoi la rencontre avec un fait brutal, inintelligible, est une expérience dangereuse, qui met en danger tant la sécurité intellectuelle que le statut professionnel du chercheur.’ (p 7)

‘Depuis des décennies, il luttait pour qu’un non savoir, une perplexité soient reconnus.’ (p 8)

P 82

Michael Borch-Jacobsen, Eric Michaud and Jean-Luc Nancy, *Hypnoses* (Paris: Galilée, 1984), 12

‘La passivité ne relève pas de la technique, ni du pouvoir, mais de l’être —et dans l’être elle communique de manière essentielle avec une liberté à laquelle elle rend disponible et sans laquelle elle n’est pas pensable.’

P 100

Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)*, t. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 35, 43, 31

‘Au regard des exigences scientifiques, le recours à l’expérience mystique est légitime puisqu’elle est « expérimentale » (c’est un fait) et qu’elle consiste en « opérations épistémiques » (ce sont des actes de connaissance), bien qu’elle devance encore ce qu’une science peut en problématiser dans ses propres termes.’ (p 35)

‘*Objets en transit*. Le phénomène bouge et se transforme dans la case qui lui a été fixée. Il faut donc circonscrire formellement ce qu’on entend par “mystique”. Travail de Sisyphe : l’objet ne cesse de retomber hors du lieu théorique où une définition l’a élevé.’ (p 43)

‘De quoi est-il question quand la mystique resurgit dans le contexte des sciences sociales?’ (p 31)

P 101

Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique (XVI^e-XVII^e siècle)*, t. II (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 38, 47

‘Je ne prétends pas tracer une histoire de l’assimilation scientifique de la mystique (une histoire qui commencerait avec le projet de la coloniser et s’achèverait avec la nécessité de l’éliminer) – ce serait une caricature -, ni prendre le fonctionnement des ‘phénomènes mystiques’ comme un indicateur possible de l’évolution récente des sciences sociales – ce serait un autre travail -, mais suggérer une ‘historicité’ singulière: les avatars de la mystique,

produits des disciplines contemporaines, ont pourtant des effets propres comme si, même dans le cadre qui les mue en objets de savoir, les fragments d'une 'science sauvage' gardaient quelque chose d'irréductible.' (p 38)

'Toute entreprise scientifique doit renoncer à tenir le réel dans les objets qu'elle y découpe. Sa rigueur se fonde sur les limites qu'elle se donne. Un apprentissage de l'oubli soutient donc la production de connaissances.' (p 47)

P 102

Jean-Daniel Causse, 'Le corps et l'expérience mystique. Analyse à la lumière de Jacques Lacan et de Michel de Certeau', *Cahiers d'études du religieux. Recherches*
<http://cerri.revues.org/1345>

'Il ne s'agit pas seulement de faire tomber les artifices du moi; il s'agit également de composer un corps à partir de ce qui manque à l'être, c'est à dire de faire du manque ce qui engendre un corps vivant, désirant, productif.'

Michel de Certeau, *La Possession de Loudun* (Paris : Gallimard, 1990), 327

'La possession ne comporte pas d'explication historique « véritable » puisque jamais il n'est possible de savoir qui est possédé et par qui. Le problème vient précisément du fait qu'il y a de la possession, nous dirions de l'« aliénation », et que l'effort pour s'en libérer consiste à la reporter, à la refouler ou à la déplacer ailleurs : d'une collectivité à un individu, du diable à la raison d'Etat, du démoniaque à la dévotion. De ce travail nécessaire, le processus n'est jamais clos.'

P 103

Jean-Daniel Causse, 'Le corps et l'expérience mystique. Analyse à la lumière de Jacques Lacan et de Michel de Certeau', *Cahiers d'études du religieux. Recherches*

'Ce corps témoigne ici, en effet, du désir de se défaire d'une possession. Il travaille à une « déprise », si l'on veut. Il cherche à se débarrasser d'un corset qui enferme dans des codes, des visions du monde et de soi, des manières de vivre et de penser. ... Il y a ici la volonté de ses soustraire à ce qui parle à la place du sujet, qui veut pour lui, qui écrase toute expression du désir singulier.'

P 105

Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*, t.II, 234, 240, 244

'C'est un travail dont le sujet est l'objet, une « science expérimentale » qui fait de la folie même le lieu du « connais-toi toi-même ».' (p 234)

'La raison, privée de l'expérience, fait face à l'expérience, privée de raison.' (p 240)

'Sur le mode du croire et sur celui du pouvoir, la question est unique : elle concerne *la possibilité du possible*, une question sous-jacente à toute « entreprise » poétique ou voyageuse. De ce point de vue, le récit de *La Science expérimentale* traite de la possibilité de

tout voyage, ou de la possibilité d'un autre espace. Une interrogation aussi folle que fondamentale.' (p 244)

P 106

Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique t.II*, 251

'Elle suppose au tact, c'est à dire à une fonction érotique indissociable de la relation à l'*autre*, une valeur de connaissance que n'a pas la relation visuelle à un *objet*.' (p 251)

P 107

Isabelle Stengers, 'William James. Naturalisme et pragmatisme au fil de la question de la possession', *Philosophie des possessions*, ed. Didier Debaise (Dijon : les Presses du réel, 2011), 56

'On pourrait dire que la possession a ici change de sens et est devenue un enjeu: le changement de disposition est un changement de possesseur, mais ce n'est pas lui qui change, ce sont plutôt ses possessions qui changent. On est possédé par ce qu'on possède et l'enjeu ici est par quoi « se faire posséder » ?'

P 130

Michel de Certeau, 'Mystique et psychoanalyse', in *Michel de Certeau*, ed. Luce Giard (Paris: Cahiers pour un temps, Centre Pompidou, 1987), 183-184

'Il s'agit d'un discours qui a fonction de fable. Il se situe du côté de la *parole*. La mystique est centrée sur la pratique et la théorie du « dialogue », que ce soit dans la prière ou dans l'échange spirituel entre sujets parlants. Par ce premier aspect, la mystique relève de la « fable », qui concerne le parler, comme son étymologie l'indique (*fari*). Elle est une science du parler, une interlocution. Au principe, elle implique une identité entre théorie et pratique de la parole, c'est à dire entre discours et fable. ... Dans le langage est fable ce qui est à la fois acte d'instaurer et acte de dire l'instauration. Donc une parole qui fait parler, qui engendre, qui donne langage et donne jour. C'est un discours poétique, de naissance, de surprise. Il n'est pas autorisé par ce qui le précède (une réalité qu'il exprimerait, une démonstration qu'il conclurait), mais par ce qu'il rend possible, par ce qu'il inaugure, par ses effets.'

P 131

Jacques le Brun, 'Michel De Certeau, *La Fable Mystique. XVIe-XVIIe siècle*', *Annales. Économies, Sociétés, Civilisations*, 1983, Volume 38, Numéro 6 (p 1297-1301) : 1299

'Cependant le performatif et le « pur » vouloir n'ont pas pour résultat de restaurer une certitude: le langage lui-même devient tout entier possibilité du mensonge, la dépendance du 'je' par rapport à un 'autre' instaure le doute et le risque.'

P 134

Michel de Certeau, *La Fable Mystique* t.II, 46

‘Du moins, en découpant une forme de savoir qui tranche sur la forme usuelle des nôtres, désigne t-elle, en principe délesté d’un *a priori* moniste ou ontologique, un type de discours — un autre « geste de la pensée » dans la langue.’

P 136

François Dosse, *Michel de Certeau : un historien de l’altérité*, Texte inédit, conférence à Mexico, septembre 2003

‘L’intervention de l’historien présuppose de faire place à l’autre tout en maintenant la relation avec le sujet qui fabrique le discours historique. Par rapport au passé, à ce qui a disparu, l’histoire « suppose un *écart*, qui est l’acte même de se constituer comme existant et pensant aujourd’hui. Ma recherche m’a appris qu’en étudiant Surin, je me distingue de lui. »’

‘La tâche qui incombe aux intellectuels est selon lui de se distancier de leurs attaches, de leurs affiliations idéologiques ainsi que de leur appartenance nationale pour faire prévaloir en chaque occasion les critères de la vérité. Il en résulte un profil d’intellectuel qui, défini par Saïd, correspond assez bien à l’itinéraire d’un Michel de Certeau : « Je définis l’intellectuel comme un exilé, un marginal, un amateur, et enfin l’auteur d’un langage qui tente de parler vrai au pouvoir. »’

P 140

Catherine David, ‘Accompagner la discursivité de l’art expérimental’, in *L’art contemporain et son exposition (I)* (Paris : l’Harmattan, 2002), 63, 69

‘Les propositions contemporaines expérimentales excèdent souvent le seul registre du visible et de l’objet (elles sont aussi constituées de textes, d’analyses, de commentaires, de scénarios et de procédures complexes), et s’articulent dans des espaces hétérogènes et multiples.’

‘Face à cela, il ne s’agit pas seulement de trouver des stratégies de contournement mais de voir en quoi ce modèle accompagne un programme idéologique et économique que l’on peut refuser en faveur de lieux et d’expériences plus variés, de processus de médiation plus inventifs, de discussions et de circulations plus ouvertes.’

P 145

Suely Rolnik, *Anthropophagie Zombie* (Paris : BlackJack editions, 2011), 34

‘Le nouveau régime ... intègre le déplacement d’un principe de subjectivation basé sur l’identité vers une subjectivité flexible, mais seulement comme une manière plus réussie de réinstaurer l’anesthésie du sujet moderne et son refus des effets de la présence vivante de l’autre dans son propre corps.’

P 177

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'institution La passivité, Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)* (Paris : Belin, 2015), 353–54

‘... la passivité est possible à condition que « avoir conscience » ne soit pas « donner un sens » que l'on détient par-devers soi à une matière de connaissance insaisissable, mais réaliser un certain écart, une certaine variante dans un champ d'existence déjà institué, qui est toujours derrière nous, et dont le poids, comme celui d'un volant, intervient jusque dans les actions par lesquelles nous le transformons. Vivre, pour un homme, n'est pas seulement imposer perpétuellement des significations, mais continuer un tourbillon d'expérience qui s'est formé, avec notre naissance, au point de contact du « dehors » et de celui qui est appelé à le vivre.’

APPENDIX 2

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Fig 1 – 2

Eran Schaerf, *fm-scenario*, new commission for
'Between Walls and Windows. Architektur und Ideologie', September 1–30, 2012
Photography: AFFOLTER - EUGSTER

Fig 3 – 4

Arno Brandhuber, *This is Me, This is My Country*, new commission for
'Between Walls and Windows. Architektur und Ideologie', September 1–30, 2012
Photography: AFFOLTER - EUGSTER

Fig 5 – 6

Amateur Architecture Studio (Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu), *Tile Theater*, new commission for
'Between Walls and Windows. Architektur und Ideologie', September 1–30, 2012
Photography: AFFOLTER – EUGSTER

Fig 7 – 8 – 9

BMW Tate Live 2015 – 'If Tate Modern was Musée de la Danse?'
Olivia Hemingway, ©Tate Photography

Fig 10 – 11

Matt Mullican, *Performance under hypnosis*, performance views Tate Modern, January 2007
Photography: Sheila Burnett, © Tate Photography

Fig 12

Matt Mullican, *Untitled*, 1978, Performance view, The Kitchen, New York
Drawing as a four-year-old (hypnotized), Courtesy of Mai 36 galerie, Zurich

Fig 13

Matt Mullican, *Performance under hypnosis*, The Kitchen, New York, 1982

Fig 14 – 15

'Hypnotiseurs et Sorcières', lecture – performance, on the invitation of Anna Colin, in the context of the exhibition 'Plus ou Moins Sorcières', Maison Pop, Montreuil, 6 avril 2012.
Text: Vanessa Desclaux; Dramaturgy: Morgane Lory; Sound: Mathieu Cannaguier;
performed by Vanessa Desclaux, Serge Ryschenkow, Nadège Sellier
Photography: Morgane Lory

Fig 16 – 17

Jean-Pascal Flavien, *PLAy*, installation views, Hedah, Maastricht, 11 mai 2011
Photography: Natalie Czech

Fig 18

Sanja Ivekovic, *Eve's Game*, performed at the occasion of 'La Monnaie Vivante', 2010.
Installation view 6th Berlin Biennale, HAU.
Photography: Uwe Walter

Fig 19

'La Monnaie Vivante', 2010. Installation view 6th Berlin Biennale, HAU. Works by Prinz Gholam, Simon Forti, Franz Erhard Walther, George Brecht, and Teresa Margolles.
Photography: Uwe Walter

Fig 20

'La Monnaie Vivante', 2006. Installation view Festival 'Faits d'Hiver', Micadanses studios, Paris. Works by Roman Ondak, Sanja Ivekovic, and Teresa Margolles.
Courtesy: CAC Brétigny

Fig 21

'La Monnaie Vivante', 2008. Installation view 'UBS: Saturday Live', Tate Modern, London. Works by Tania Bruguera and Annie Vigier et Franck Apertet (les gens d'Uterpan).
Photography: Sheila Burnett, © Tate Photography

Fig 22

'La Monnaie Vivante', 2010. Installation view Teatr Dramatyczny in collaboration with the Museum of Modern Art in Warsaw. Works by Franz Erhard Walther, Robert Breer, Santiago Sierra, and Roman Ondak.
Courtesy: Museum of Modern Art Warsaw

Fig 23 – 24

Oo, Cyprus and Lithuanian Pavillons, Palasport, Venice, curated by Raimundas Malašauskas. Installation views 55th Venice Biennale, 2013
Photography: Robertas Narkus

Fig 25

Myriam Lefkowitz. *Walk, hands, eyes (Venice, 2013)*, *Oo*, Cyprus and Lithuanian Pavillons, Palasport, Venice, 55th Venice Biennale, 2013
Photography: Robertas Narkus

Fig 26 – 27

'Done: Fatal Holography', curated by Raimundas Malašauskas, installation views Tulips & Roses, Brussels, 2011.
All images courtesy of Tulips and Roses, Brussels

Fig 28

Jean-Luc Blanc, *Miranda 4*, 2012 / Courtesy Art:Concept, Paris / Vitrine (documents, photos, revues...) / Louise Bourgeois Mémorial de Steilneset à Vardø (Norvège)
'L'Heure des sorcières', installation view centre d'art Le Quartier, Quimper, 2014.
Photography: Dieter Kik

Fig 29

Richard John Jones & Max Allen, *Develop Your Legitimate Strangeness*, 2014 / Bruce Lacey, *Awakening of the Earth Goddess*, Rougham, 1982 / Courtesy British Film Institute, Londres
'L'Heure des sorcières', installation view centre d'art Le Quartier, Quimper, 2014.
Photography: Dieter Kik

Fig 30

Florence Doléac, *Le Salon d'Emmeline Avery*, 2014

'L'Heure des sorcières', installation views centre d'art Le Quartier, Quimper, 2014.

Photography: Dieter Kik

Fig 31

Mary Beth Edelson, *Proposals for: Memorials to 9,000,000 Women Burned as Witches in the Christian Era*, 1977-2014 / Courtesy A.I.R. Gallery, New York

'L'Heure des sorcières', installation views centre d'art Le Quartier, Quimper, 2014.

Photography: Dieter Kik

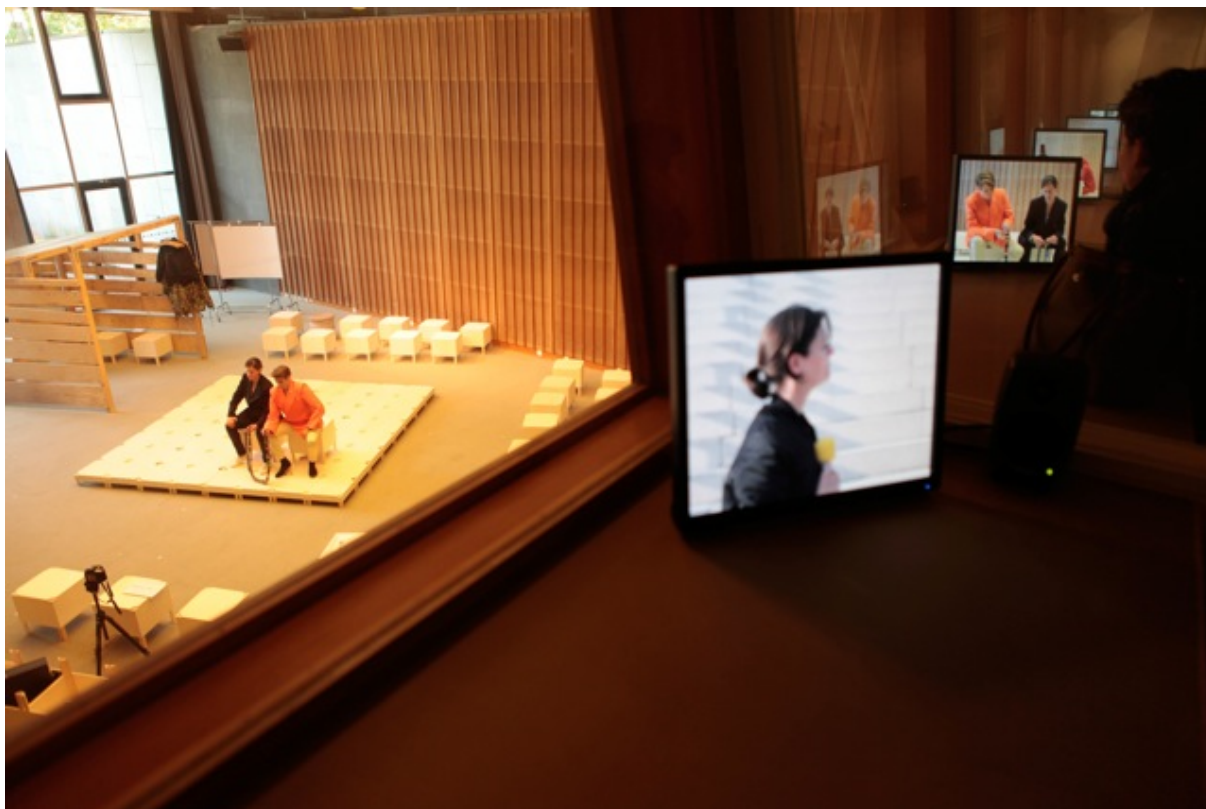


Fig 1

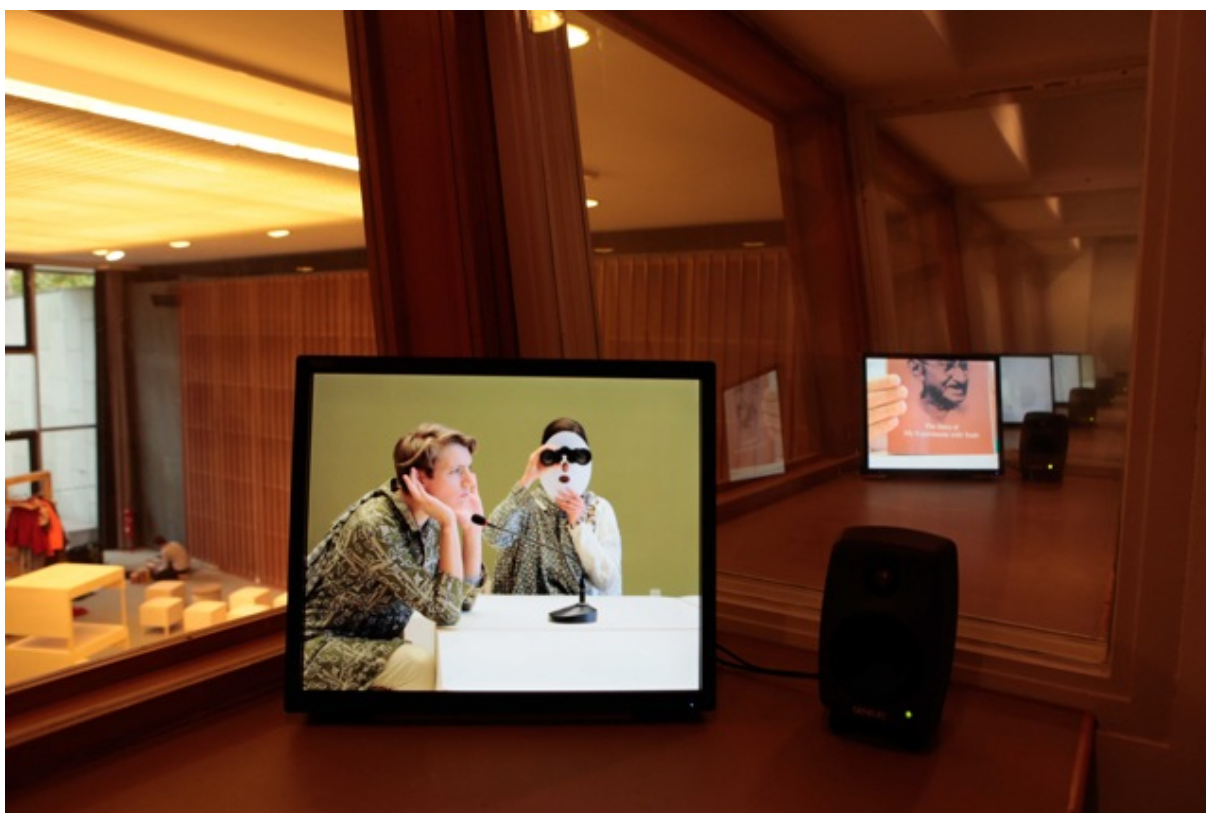


Fig 2



Fig 3



Fig 4



Fig 5



Fig 6



Fig 7



Fig 8



Fig 9



Fig 10



Fig 11



Fig 12



Fig 13



Fig 14



Fig 15



Fig 16



Fig 17



Fig 18



Fig 19



Fig 20



Fig 21



Fig 22



Fig 23



Fig 24



Fig 25

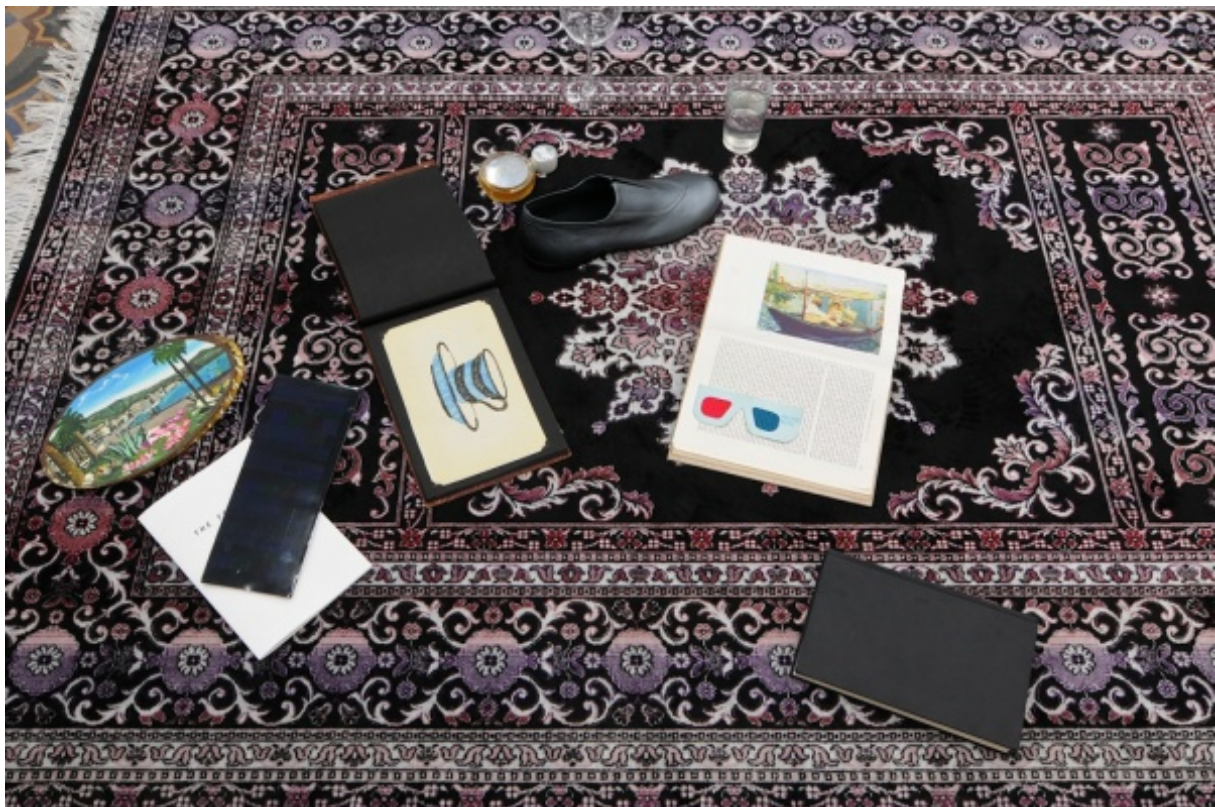


Fig 26



Fig 27



Fig 28



Fig 29



Fig 30



Fig 31