Echoing With a Difference: Curating Voices and the Politics of Participation

PhD in Fine Art

Research Platform for Curatorial and Cross-disciplinary Cultural Studies,
Practice-Based Doctoral Programme
Department of Art, University of Reading

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June 2023

Declaration of Original Authorship

Declaration

I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources
has been properly and fully acknowledged.

Word Count: 87,040

Acknowledgements

Abstract

The thesis *Echoing with a Difference—Curating Voices and the Politics of Participation*, probes participatory curatorial practices that entail agonistic relations, embodying, voicing and instigating conflicts. Taking the global wave of the post-financial crisis protests in 2011 as an entry point, the thesis critically discusses its impact on participatory artistic and curatorial practices, and the ambivalent manifestations of this impact in collective vocal utterings. Here, the focus lies on my own curatorial projects – *The Infiltrators* (Tel Aviv, 2014), *Preaching to the Choir* (Herzliya, 2015), *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)communal Bodies* (Reading, 2019), and *Voice Over* (Maastricht, 2020) – and how they respond to changes in perceptions of identity and to the silencing of alternative voices.

Focusing on both the potential power as well as the challenges of participation, the thesis reexamines participatory practices that make use of the human voice between the conversational to the antagonistic (Bishop, Kester, Marchart). Building from postcolonial, feminist, and critical theory, I formulate participatory curating and research not as a simple echoing of others but as an interpretation and reverberation with differences, following Spivak who analysed Ovid's tale arguing that Echo's repetition marked a difference which disclosed the truth of self-knowledge. This embodied, performative position (Rogoff, Garces, Bala), entangled between the personal and the professional and relating to gender constructs in research and curatorial discourse (Buurman, Richter, Fournier), searches to connect to other bodies and voices to create a collectivity based on situated knowledge (Haraway). Infiltrating the borders between the participatory and the performative as well as between the representational and the political realms, this practice-based research attempts to define what the role of a participatory curator might entail as a conflictual mediator. The thesis therefore serves as a call for curators to embody polyphonic contradictions and to imagine different futurities, through the notion of preenactment (Marchart) – an artistic enactment of a political event that has not yet occurred; to function as a double agent in the liminal sphere between the wish to generate conflicts and the need to maintain their borders.

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> Protest is an invitation to polyphony, to the invention of forms in thought, and to multiplying sources for thinking.
>
> Raqs Media Collective[1]

1. Introduction

The starting point of this thesis is a presumed connection between shifts in participatory artistic and curatorial practices, and the global wave of protests that started around 2011, after the financial crisis of 2007–8.[2] In an era marked

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[1] Melissa Karmen Lee, Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula, Shuddhabrata Sengupta, 'Protest as Polyphony: An Interview with Raqs Media Collective', *ASAP/Journal*, vol. 3, no. 2, (May, 2018), 187–202, https://works.raqsmediacollective.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/asa.2018.0008.pdf Accessed 28 March 2023.

[2] The financial crisis of 2007–2008 was a severe worldwide financial crisis, related to extreme risk taking by banks in the US leading to the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and followed by an international banking crisis. The European debt crisis began with a deficit in Greece in 2009, that together with the crisis in the US sparked a global recession. This crisis in the US and in Europe along with the ongoing political conflicts in the Middle East were followed by upheavals in many parts of the world which peaked in 2011, termed the Occupy Movement, the Social Justice Movement, the Arab Spring and others, depending on their location. With various occupations of the public sphere in Tel Aviv, Istanbul, Madrid, New York and many other places, the

by a perpetual state of emergency and constant violations of citizens' rights and freedoms, this research examines how protest movements impacted participatory practices as well as the critique of participation, manifested via the voice-body and individual-collective relations. In particular, it probes participatory curatorial practices that entail agonistic relations, questioning and exemplifying how these practices embody, voice, instigate, and sometimes inadvertently tame conflicts.

The projects covered in the practice-based component of this thesis, as well as the methodology and theory, are directly linked to the urgent protest movements of the last decade; these movements in fact continue to develop and shape shift as this thesis is being finalised. The thesis examines how my own curatorial projects engage with the ever-growing extremism in forms of governmentality and identity; how my curatorial practice responds to changes in perceptions of identity and community, developed in parallel and at times as a backlash to the rise of the protest movements; and how these developments relate to threats on freedom of speech and freedom of movement, and to silencing of alternative voices that don't adhere to prevailing myths and hegemonic agendas. Looking at the political agency of the voice, and how it is manifested via participatory and performative artistic and curatorial projects, this thesis is interested both in the potential power as well as the challenges of participation. The research always fluctuates between dual potentialities—the voice and the body's abilities to be governed and controlled as well as to subvert and undermine forms of governing.

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movement was mostly protesting international financial policies and economic injustices.

Antagonistic participatory notions, endeavours and utterances are reexamined through the lens of the curatorial, as intimately and reflexively questioning identity constructs in parallel to their resurgence and transformation in the public sphere. Infiltrating the borders between the participatory and the performative as well as between the representational and the political realms, the role of the 'participatory curator' is constantly being redefined as a conflictual mediator, and the act of participatory curating as echoing with a difference. The participatory curatorial act is examined as one that can potentially reflect, impact, mediate and initiate forms of participation that invite a more nuanced relation to definitions of 'I' and 'we', me and the other.

The participatory, as it was theorised and practised in the field of visual arts, is examined in the thesis as a problematic term, always fighting an inner battle between its emancipatory ideals and its role as serving the oppressive assembly line of neoliberalism. The contested notion of the participatory manifests the unbridgeable gap between aspirations of commoning and collectivisation and their implementation, and between the promise of democracy as allowing agency and freedom for all, and its reality, where the right to participate is not given equally, and the right not to participate is even scarcer. The research aims to resonate these complexities while reverberating the political urgency and agency of participatory artistic and curatorial voices as they shift between the conversational and the antagonistic, and destabilise the boundaries between the two.[3] Such a ~~reflection on participation~~ exposes

[3]Terms coined by Grant Kester, Claire Bishop, Oliver Marchart and others, which I will explain in depth in chapter 2.

Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces, Community and Conversation in Modern Art*. (Berkley and Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2004).

the murky terrain and blurry lines between past utopic ideals of a democratic society and their grim presence, raising questions about what is still to come. In that sense, the ability of voice and movement to order and interpolate on the one hand and to subvert and refuse on the other, is not staged as an either dystopic or utopic proposition; instead, it is emphasised as a call to embody contradiction and as an invitation to imagine different futurities, through the notion of preenactment—an artistic enactment of a political event that has not yet occurred.

Looking at a selective history of participatory and performative vocal and choreographic utterings, and how they coincided with the political, the thesis examines how these recent practices meander on the scale from antagonistic

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Grant Kester, 'The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent', *e-flux journal.* no. 31 (January, 2012).

Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, no. 110, (January, 2004), 51-79.

Claire Bishop,'The Social Turn, Collaboration and its Discontent', *Artforum*, (February 2006), 179–185.

Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, (London and New York: Verso, 2012).

Claire Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?', in *Living as Form, Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, edited by Nato Thompson, (New York: and Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: Creative Time Books and MIT Press, 2012), 34–45.

Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics, Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press and Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2019).

over accentuation to modes of listening and care; through studies of 'speaking assemblies' in the form of demonstrations, exhibitions, performances, workshops, choirs, think tanks, marathons, marches and training camps, nuanced shifts in artistic and curatorial manifestations of collectivity are being examined—shifts that began to take shape, as aforesaid, with the protest movements that began in 2011; ones that allow room for refusal and uncommoning, without essentialising conflictuality.

In the practice-based section of this thesis I examine four projects that I curated: *The Infiltrators* (2014),[4] that although happened before this research began, set the territory upon which it is built; *Preaching to the Choir* (2015)[5] which initiated the research; and (*Un*)*Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal*

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[4] *The Infiltrators*, Artport, Tel Aviv, 2014, was a group exhibition created with the participation of asylum seekers, looking at participatory art as an act of infiltration. Three projects were commissions with African asylum seeker communities in Israel. Artists: Daniel Landau, Paul Poet, Ghana Think Tank, Documentary Embroidery. Affiliated events included a conference at Artport addressing refugees in Israeli society, as well as a lecture and panel with artist collective 'Ghana Think Tank' and writer Anthony Alessandrini at the Center for The Humanities, The Graduate Center, City University of New York. The printed catalogue and the exhibition's website included Claire Bishop's article 'Participation and Spectacle—Where Are We Now?' courtesy of Claire Bishop, Creative Time and MIT press, translated to Hebrew, Arabic and Tigrinya: http://cargocollective.com/INFILTRATORS

[5] *Preaching to the Choir,* Herzlyia Museum of Art, Israel, 2015. Participatory projects involving choirs as a political voice, with Chto Delat, Effi and Amir, Zeljka Blaksic, Irina Botea, Omer Krieger and Nir Evron, Luigi Coppola, Marco Godoy and Tali Keren. Publication can be read here (English begins at the end):

https://www.herzliyamuseum.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Catalogue_0809.pdf

Bodies (2019)[6] as well as *Voice Over* (2020–2021)[7] which were created during my PhD studies and in direct relation to it. In addition to my own curatorial endeavours, I focus as well on three projects that I participated in and that mark the beginning and the end of a decade—*Truth is Concrete* (2012),[8] *Training*

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[6] *(Un)Commoning Voices & (Non)Communal Bodies* (co-curator with Sarah Spies), was a series of exhibitions, performances, workshops and talks in ZhDK and Tanzhaus, Zurich (2018) and in Reading, UK, as part of Reading:International (2019). Participating artists, speakers, and writers: Zbyněk Baladrán, Željka Blakšić, Susan Gibb, Marco Godoy, Chto Delat/Dmitry Vilensky, Noam Inbar and Nir Shauloff, Jamila Johnson-Small/Last Yearz Interesting Negro and Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome, Mikhail Karikis, Tali Keren, Florian Malzacher, Public Movement, Michal Oppenheim, Rory Pilgrim, Edgar Schmitz, Jack Tan, Nina Wakeford, and Katarina Zdjelar The publication is a hybrid of a retrospective catalogue and a collaborative research (also available in print):

https://www.on-curating.org/book/UnCommoning-Voices-and-NonCommunal-Bodies.html - .YYgCgpNud24 Accessed 2 April 2023.

[7] *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Holland, 2020–21. From poetic sculptures and video essays to participatory documentaries with displaced communities, *Voice Over* shows a range of works that explore the political power and potential of the human voice. With works by Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Yusra Abo Kaf, Effi and Amir, Shilpa Gupta, Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy, Amir Yatziv and Katarina Zdjelar. Publication (also available in print): https://www.bonnefanten.nl/en/exhibitions/voice-over/bf_booklet_voice-over_en.pdf Accessed 2 April 2023.

[8] *Truth is Concrete, a 24/7 Marathon Camp on Political Practices in Art and Artistic Practices in Politics,* 21–28 September 2012, steirischer herbst festival, Graz,

for the Future (2021)[9] and documenta fifteen (2022),[10] juxtaposing an embodiment of my conflictual experience as a participant to that of my role as a curator.

Migrating from the context of my native country Israel to other geographies and retrospectively mapping and exploring the various projects, the thesis sketches an intimate reflection on the challenges of participatory curating as I have experienced them. I trace my writing and practice with feminist thinkers who encourage an embodied, performative position that searches to connect to other bodies and voices in order to create a collectivity based on situated knowledge. Through and with these texts and others, as I will explain in the upcoming chapters, I think on the resonance of my own voice in curating and in research, as well as on how it engages with others. When engaging with communities who are silenced and marginalised, the research reflects on the potential challenges and blind spots of working in this context, remembering the importance of being with others rather than speaking on their behalf. In that

Austria, curated by Anne Faucheret, Veronica Kaup-Hasler, Kira Kirsch and& Florian Malzacher idea and concept). For a full participants list:

https://florianmalzacher.net/content/truth-is-concrete-a-24-7-marathon-camp-on-artistic-strategies-in-politics-and-political-strategies-in-art/ Accessed 2 April 2023.

[9] *Training for the Future*, 20–22 September, 2019, Ruhrtriennale, Bochum, Germany. Project by Jonas Staal, curated and co-programmed by Florian Malzacher. For a full participants list:

http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/training-for-the-future/ Accessed 2 April 2023.

[10] documenta fifteen, 18 June–25 September 2022, Kassel, Germany, with ruangrupa collective as the artistic directors. For a full participants list:
https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/ Accessed 2 April 2023.

sense, I perceive participatory curating not as a simple echoing of others but as an interpretation and reverberation with differences; I search for a practice that enables dissensus and allows for a polyphony of voices without shying away from conflicts; one that reflects on the very character of participation through a constant reciprocity between speaking and listening, remaining in flux as an embodiment of the problematics of participation. In that sense, the thesis examines how a curator functions as a sort of double agent in the liminal sphere between the wish to generate conflicts and the need to maintain their borders.

Theory

In the following chapters, I constantly juxtapose theory, practice and methodology, as for me they are inherently intermingled and entangled. I also switch between the personal and the professional as part of my methodology, as I'll explain momentarily. In terms of theory, the thesis surveys the lineage of theories around participatory art and where they meet with the political and the performative; it also questions what has changed in both discourse and participatory practices in the last decade, beginning from the social and economic crisis of 2007–8 and the vast global protest movement that it ignited.

Following several case studies and using a pastiche of theoretical and methodological strands, I attempt to explore what a 'participatory curator' might be, a term that has not been defined as of yet. For this purpose, I juxtapose the theories around participatory art with ones from the fields of art history, performance studies, philosophy, psychology, critical theory, political theory, education, capitalism critique, as well as texts dealing with relationality and care in curatorial practice and embodiment in artistic practice and research, to try and form this new definition. The uniqueness of this research lies in the

crossover of ideological terrain, regarding the agency of the human voice in participatory practices, as well as embodied forms of research and critique, from a nuanced curatorial perspective.

Methodology

My methodology revolves around critical embodiment in writing and research, translated into curatorial and curatorial-research practice. I borrow terminology from feminist and postcolonial thinkers in diverse fields such as the literary, academic, psychological, activist and curatorial. From notions of embodied criticality (Rogoff),[11] thinking of the exhibition as a temporary political community where identity is always in flux; to embodying critique (Garces, Bergermann)[12] or becoming research (Rogoff) where the subjective gets entangled with the political through first-person accounts, particularly in regard to how this translates to research of the participatory (Bala);[13] and finally how the entanglement between the personal and the political, and between the

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[11] Irit Rogoff, 'Smuggling – an Embodied Criticality', *EIPCP* (2006) http://eipcp.net/dlfiles/rogoff-smuggling/attachment_download/rogoff-smuggling.pdf Accessed 30 May, 2023.

[12] Marina Garcés, 'To Embody Critique: Some Theses: Some Examples',*Transversal*, (June, 2006), https://transversal.at/transversal/0806/garces/en Accessed 30 May, 2023 and Ulrike Bergermann, 'Un/Easy Resonance, the Critical Plural', in *The Art of Being Many: Towards a New Theory and Practice of Gathering*, eds. Geheimagentur *et al* (Berlin:Transcript-Verlag publishing, 2016), 103–116.

[13] Sruti Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art,* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018).

intimate and the professional and scientific, relates to gender constructs (Spivak, Haraway, Fournier, Richter).[14] In that sense the voice I reflect on here is also my own voice, as a curator and as a woman, and the conflicts that it meets along the way are related to a lineage of thought around these identity formations, along with other complexities related to the place where I was born and the religion that was assigned to me by birth—complexities which I will address momentarily.

Practical Component: Case Studies

As embodied critique, my focus is only on projects that I either curated or experienced as a participant, switching roles in order to see things from both perspectives. Thus I'm limited in the scope that I cover, and although I don't limit my research to certain zones geographically,[15] it mostly looks to the Middle

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[14] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', *Feminist Studies*, vol. 14, no. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 575–599.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak,'Echo', *New Literary History, v*ol. 24, no. 1, Culture and Everyday Life (Winter, 1993), 17–43.

Dorothee Richter, 'Artists and Curators as Authors—Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers?', *OnCurating* no. 19, On Artistic and Curatorial Authorship, (June 2013), 43–57.

Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism,* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2021).

[15] Sruti Bala has pointed out that there are constant relations between the development or resurgence of participatory practices and socio-political transformations, which are not limited to specific geographical locations. She quotes

East, where I'm based, and to Europe, where I studied and where I was privileged enough to travel often.[16] My knowledge and collaboratory experience with artists based in the Middle East is also limited due to political constructs that I will explain later in this chapter. As this is a practice-based PhD, I don't claim to cover the entire history of the critique and theory of participation, or to give ample examples of diverse participatory curatorial practices; in addition, I'm not interested in drawing boundaries and forming definitions of different fields of participatory practices in the arts, for example to differentiate between participation in theatre, performance studies, visual arts or media studies. Instead, I wish to deconstruct and analyse my own multidisciplinary practice in retrospect, by drawing lines and connecting threads with other practitioners and thinkers. I acknowledge the lack of those who are not part of this research, and constantly aspire to learn and unlearn from others.

Gerald Raunig in regards to neighbouring zones with overlapping practices of art and revolution. At the same time, she emphasisises that what is defined as participatory changes under different historical circumstances. Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art*, 9–10.

[16] In terms of history and theory, I also cover mostly European and US-based theorists as my studies have been focused on those, and the scope of this research is limited. However, I'm aware of the problematics of this limited view, particularly when writing about marginalised and silenced voices, and I hope that in the future I will be able to learn more from other cultural and geographical contexts. My last visit during the time span of working on this research was to documenta fifteen which showed many non-European projects that revolved around participation, as well as experimenting with participatory methodology in curating, and although I will not be able to cover it extensively, I will return to these questions in the concluding chapter.

In the case studies, as aforesaid, I take a close look at four projects that I curated as an independent curator over the course of a decade.[17] In addition to analysing the curatorial aspects of these projects, I extend the focus to the practices of five artists and artist collectives that I've worked with—Ghana Think Tank, Effi & Amir, Tali Keren, Public Movement and Lawrence Abu Hamdan. Attempting to understand their terms of engagement with audiences and protagonists, as they juxtapose with my own, I wish to 'decipher' how they balance antagonism and care through stretching what might be considered as participatory. In terms of case studies of other curators, I focus on two projects, *Truth is Concrete* (2012) and *Training for the Future* (2021), that take the notion of preenactment into a curatorial realm, and touch upon ruangrupa's documenta fifteen (2022) as a complex example of the beauty and pain of radical participatory curating.

Through these examples of my own projects and others I look at how participation is different to both collaboration and commoning; how curating in a participatory manner differs from curating participatory practices; and how the role of the participatory curator might differ from the one of an artist working with participatory practices. The juxtaposition between the projects

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[17] As previously mentioned, *The Infiltrators* (2014), *Preaching to the Choir* (2015), *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies* (2019) and *Voice Over* (2020– 2021). Due to the limited scope of the research I had to leave out a large body of work that stems from my positions as an institutional curator at Line 16 Community Gallery for Contemporary Art, at the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv and at the Art Cube Artists' Studios Jerusalem, where I established LowRes Jerusalem residency. These positions provided a valuable experience for me in building a long-term perspective and an institutional vision around participatory and community-based practices, each in its own unique way.

has sharpened my understanding of the gaps between intention and result as well as spotlighted my own blind spots and will hopefully provide the readers with valuable examples that might resonate with their own endeavours.

Chapter Layout

In the first chapter I write about the challenges of curating participatory art and answering the needs of conflicting agendas, those of the art institution, the artists, the audience and the community. I question the agency of the curatorial voice, in mediating and expressing an agenda, in relation to other voices, and between speaking and listening.

I lay out my methodology of embodied research and embodied curating as echoing with a difference, (Haraway,[18] Rogoff,[19] Garces,[20] Spivak,[21] Bergermann,[22] Bala,[23] Fournier[24]) and explain how the history of these forms of embodiment relate to feminist theory. I then render the gendered aspect of curating and how a female curator is expected to be a sort of silent mediator

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[18] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'.

[19] Rogoff, 'Smuggling – an Embodied Criticality'.

[20] Garcés, 'To Embody Critique: Some Theses: Some Examples'.

[21] Spivak, 'Echo', 17–43.

[22] Ulrike Bergermann, 'Un/Easy Resonance, the Critical Plural', 103–116.

[23] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art.*

[24] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism.*

and caretaker, while a male curator is the symbol of the genius author, like the male artist (Richter,[25] Burmann,[26] Krasny[27]).

I reflect on the curatorial function in relation to care (Fowle,[28] Levi Strauss[29]) and how the definition of the curatorial changed over the years to describe relations rather than presentations (Von Bismarck,[30] Rogoff[31], Oneil,[32] Von

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[25] Richter, 'Artists and Curators as Authors—Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers?',43-57.

[26] Nanne Buurman, 'Angels in the White Cube – Rhetoric of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13)', *OnCurating*, no. 29, Curating in Feminist Thought, (May, 2016), 146–162.

[27] Elke Krasny, 'The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex', in *Feminism and Art History Now: Radical Critiques of Theory and Practice,* edited by Victoria Horne and Lara Perry, (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), 147–163.

[28] Kate Fowle, 'Who Cares', in *Cautionary Tales,* ed. Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (NY: Apexart, 2007).

[29] David Levi Strauss, 'The Bias of the World, Curating After Szeeman & Hopps', in *Cautionary Tales,* ed. Steven Rand and Heather Kouris (NY: Apexart, 2007).

[30] Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski, eds., *Cultures of the Curatorial,* (Berlin: Sternberg; Leipzig Kulturen des Kuratorischen, Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig, 2012).

[31] Irit Rogoff,' The Expanding Field'. In *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating,* ed. Jean-Paul Martinon, 41-48. London: Bloomsbury, 2013.

[32] Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

Hantelman,[33] Lind[34]), and got closer to a participatory approach (Sternfeld and Ziaja),[35] and then I examine what a participatory curatorial approach could be in the context of care. I emphasise the specificity of my own challenges in regard to the politics of my native country Israel, both in terms of censorship from within and also considering the boycott.

In the second chapter, I examine theories in the field of participation, focusing on practices which have been described as antagonistic (Helguera[36] and Bishop[37] following Mouffe and Laclau[38]) and those which define themselves as

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[33] Dorothea von Hantelmann, 'The Experiential Turn', On Performativity. Living Collections Catalogue, Vol.1, Elizabeth Carpenter (ed), (Minneapolis; Walker Art Center, 2014).

https://walkerart.org/collections/publications/performativity/experiential-turn/ Accessed 29 May, 2023.

[34] *Performing the Curatorial Within and Beyond Art,* Maria Lind (ed), London: Sternberg Press, 2012).

[35] Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, 'What Comes After the Show? On Post-representational Curating'. *OnCurating,* no. 14, (2012), 22–24.

[36] Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Handbook,* (New York: Jorg Pinto Books, 2011).

[37] Bishop*, Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship;* Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?'.

[38] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 2001).

dialogic (Kester)[39]or conversational (Krasny[40]). I look at how reflexivity, according to these theories, is inherent to participatory practices, and explain why I adopt it as one of my main tools in writing this thesis, as a way of enabling the appearance of complexities and conflictuality in order to constantly question my own authority and identity-related blind spots.

I look at how theories of the participatory connect to the construction of a nonhomogenous community (Kwon[41]) in relation to Nancy's definition of an inoperative community[42] and Althusser's concept of interpellation.[43] Richter and Gertenbach[44] further develop Nancy's theory in relation to Lacan's rendition of the imaginary and the political; juxtaposed with Laclau and

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[39] Kester, *Conversation Pieces, Community and Conversation in Modern Art*.

[40] Krasny, *The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex.*

[41] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another, Site Specific Art and Locational Identity,* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, England: The MIT Press, 2002).

[42] Jean-Luc. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor, translated by Peter Connor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

[43] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays*, Translated by Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

[44] Lars Gertenbach and Dorothee Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community—Deliberations Following the Deconstructivist Challenge of the Thinking of Community', *OnCurating*, no. 7 vol. 11, 'Being-with', (2010). https://www.on-curating.org/issue-7-reader/on-being-present-where-you-wish-to-disappear-636.html#.ZHYrzqXMJEY Accessed 2 April, 2023.

Mouffe's[45] concern with articulating political demands through a performative constitution of equality, I follow Richter and Gertenbach's question as to whether the participatory could indeed manifest emancipatory politics, rather than merely point to its own failures; I connect this question to my search for a third option—neither a naive victory nor a tragic mirroring of failures—both in the curatorial and in the artistic perspective.

The chapter then examines how participation is theorised considering its cooptation by capitalism and as a (broken) promise of democracy (Mouffe,[46] Brown,[47] Barney, Coleman, Ross, Sterne and Tembeck,[48] Stalder,[49] Bala[50]), and in relation to the history of avant-garde art (Bürger).[51]Relational aesthetics receive an in-depth critical examination as an early attempt to define

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[45] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

[46] Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics, Thinking the World Politically*, (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 87–89

[47] Wendy Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution* (NY: Zone Books, 2015)

[48] Darin Barney, Gabriella Coleman, Christine Ross, Jonathan Sterne, and Tamar Tembeck, eds*., The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, Electronic Mediations 51 (London/ Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).

[49] Felix Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, trans. Valentine A. Pakis (Massachusetts: Polity Press, 2018).

[50] Bala, *The Gestures of Participation.*

[51] Peter Bürger, *Theorie Der Avantgarde* (Frankfurt am Main: Surkamp Verlag, 1974); Michael Shaw, trans., *Theory of the Avant-garde*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1984), 47–54.

participatory art and in contrast to the conflictual reflexivity that the thesis seeks (Bourriaud,[52] Bishop,[53] Gillick,[54] Kester,[55] Miller,[56] Sollfrank, Stadler and Neiderberger,[57] Kontopoulou[58]). Following these theories on participatory art, I ask what kind of aesthetics and ethics participatory curating would entail, comparing the perception of antagonisms in Kester's dialogic practice, Bishop's relational antagonism and Marchart's conflictual aesthetics.[59] This examination lays the ground for asking whether there exists a participatory curatorial practice that is neither moralistic and emancipatory, nor a nihilistic replication of exploitation.

In the third chapter, I examine the first case study, the exhibition *The Infiltrators* I curated in Artport Gallery in Tel Aviv (2014). While the second chapter laid

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[52] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance et al (Paris: Les Presses du Réel, 2002).

[53] Bishop, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.*

[54] Liam Gillick, Letters and Responses, *October*, vol. 115 (Winter 2006), 95–107.

[55] Kester, *Conversation Pieces* and Kester, 'The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent'.

[56] Jason Miller, 'Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond', *Field – A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism*, retrieved: http://field-journal.com/issue-3/activism-vs-antagonism-socially-engaged-art-from-bourriaud-to-bishop-and-beyond, 2016

[57] Cornelia Sollfrank, Felix Stalder and Shusha Neiderberger eds, *Aesthetics of the Commons*, (Zurich and Berlin: Zurich University of the Art, Diaphanes Press, 2021).

[58] Anna Alkistis Kontopoulou*, Curation of Autonomy*, (Zurich: OnCurating.org, 2022).

[59] Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics, Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere.*

the grounds for understanding participatory art and its various manifestations on a scale of conflictual approaches, in the third chapter I begin to examine what a participatory curatorial approach could be, scrutinising the ethical, aesthetic and political issues that arise in the process. I look at the act of curating as occurring between the enabling of the appearance of a conflict and the taming of its borders, through an examination of the forms of collectivisation and participation that occurred between the artists and the curator, the artists and the community, and the curator and the community, as well as the audience's participation. Looking at some critical responses to the exhibition, I also show how judging a participatory project solely via objects (or documentations) shown in an exhibition always amplifies a lacuna of what cannot be shown: the intimate relations of participation.

In the fourth chapter, which offers another theoretical perspective, I focus on the human voice as a manifestation of critical participation (Chion,[60] Freud,[61]

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[60] Michel Chion, *L'Audio-vision* (Paris: Nathan, 1990), 107–17.

[61] Sigmund Freud, 'The Uncanny', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917–1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works* (London: Vintage Classics, 2001),217–256.

Connor,[62] Moten,[63] Coyne,[64] LaBelle[65]). Examining the character of the human voice and its potential political agency, I differentiate between the realms of the voice and the gaze, examining the contested relationship among them (McLuhan,[66] Dolar,[67] Žižek[68]). I look at how the voice in and as participation juxtaposes with theories of performance as speech acts (Austin)[69] and how these manifest, enact and deconstruct essentialist definitions of identity

[62] Steven Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[63] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003),.

[64] Richard Coyne, 'Voice and Space: Agency of the Acousmêtre in Spatial Design', in *Exploration of Space, Technology, and Spatiality: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Phil Turner, Susan Turner and Elisabeth Davenport, (New York: Information science Reference, IGI Global, 2009), 102–112.

[65] Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, (New York, London, New Delhi and Sydney: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

[66] Marshall Mcluhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).

[67] Mladen Dolar, 'The Object Voice', in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects (Series: SIC 1)*, Renata Salecl and Slavoj *Žižek*, eds. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 7–31.

[68] Slavoj Žižek, 'I Hear You With My Eyes; or, The Invisible Master', in *Gaze and Voice as Love Objects* (Series: SIC 1), Renata Salecl and Slavoj Žižek, eds. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 90–126.

[69] J.L. Austin, 'How to Do Things with Words', The Williams James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955 (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1962).

through deviant repetitions or enacted critique (Butler[70] in connection with Barthes,[71] Derrida,[72] Moten,[73] Loxley[74]). I examine how these rearticulations enact an agonistic public sphere (Deutsche[75], Marchart[76]) and differentiate the

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[70] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York/London: Routledge,1999) and Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1997) and Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2018).

[71] Ronald Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', in *Image-Music-Text*, translated by Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 179–189.

[72] Jacques Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 100. Translated by S. Weber (Chicago University Press: Evanston, 1988).

[73] Fred Moten, 'Voices/Forces, Migration, Surplus and the Black Avant Garde', in *Writing Aloud, the Sonics of Language*, eds. Brandon Labelle and Christof Migone, (New York: Errant Bodies Press with Ground Fault Recordings, 2001), 47–-57.

[74] James Loxley, 'Being Performative: Butler', in *Performativity,* (London and New York: Routledge Press, 2007), 113–123.

[75] Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics,* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996) and Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics, Artistic Activism and the Public Sphere.*

[76] Oliver Marchart, 'Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult Relation of Public Art, Urbanism and Political Theory', *Transversal,* (January, 2002), https://transversal.at/transversal/0102/marchart/en. Retrieved June 2022.

physical public sphere from the virtual one (Caffoni,[77] Harney and Moten[78]) in its manifestation of temporality. The deviant repetition of speech acts as a resistance to objectification, and leads into an examination of how repetition creates a public space in relation to exhibition making. This is examined via Rogoff's notions of embodied criticality and smuggling.[79] Rogoff describes criticality as a state of profound frustration, where instead of finding fault or passing judgment according to a consensus of values, we performatively and reflectively embody an uncertain present.[80] In affinity with Nancy[81], her concepts engage with the relations between people in the temporary sphere of the exhibition as enacting a certain politics, a transformative inhabitation, which puts us in a heightened state of awareness.[82]

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[77] Paolo Caffoni with diagrams by Falke Pisano, 'Breaking from the Government of Publics', in *Regarding Spectatorship: Revolt and Distant Observer*, Marianna Liosi and Boaz Levin eds, 2015. http://www.regardingspectatorship.net/23/

[78] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, '*All Incomplete*', (Colchester/New York/Port Watson/Minor Compositions 2021).

[79] Irit Rogoff, *Smuggling—an Embodied Criticality*, 2006, http://xenopraxis.net/readings/rogoff_smuggling.pdf

Irit Rogoff, 'We—Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations' , in *I Promise it's Political*, Cologne: Museum Ludwig, 2002, https://insessionfkagradjob.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Copy-of-WE-Rogoff.pdf

[80] Rogoff, 'Smuggling—an Embodied Criticality'.

[81] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* Translated by Robert D. Richardson, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1995]).

[82] Rogoff, 'We—Collectivities, Mutualities'.

Towards the end of the fourth chapter, I write about a case study which I took part in as a participant, the marathon-camp *Truth is Concrete* (2012), a curatorial experiment meant to exhaust and undermine social constructs, using curatorial performativity, collaboration and participation as its major tools. I examine how the project's enacted repetitions ruptured identity constructs and became a transformative experience, which planted the seeds of this research.

After examining the sphere of the voice as a dual, conflictual arena between the self and others, exemplified through the notion of deviant repetitions, the fifth chapter delves into an examination of the agency of the voice in and as a collective. The structural format of the choir, with its continuous listening and speaking, served as a tool with which to examine participatory practices in both literal and metaphoric means. After looking at examples of political choirs that developed in parallel in both the art world and the political realm in the last decade, and questioning what historical precedents they might echo, I look at theorisations of the relations between artistic and political utterings (Attali, Sholette)[83] and specifically in relation to collective utterings of sound and voice in protest such as the format of the 'human microphone' (Dyson, Bergermann).[84] Bergermann questioned the simplicity of the messages and the

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[83] Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*. Trans. Brian Massumi, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985) and Gregory Sholette, 'Art Out of Joint: Artists' Activism Before and After the Cultural Turn', in *I Can't Work Like This, A Reader On Recent Boycotts and Contemporary Art*, eds. Joanna Warsza and participants of the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2017).

[84] Frances Dyson, *The Tone of Our Times, Sound, Sense, Economy, and Ecology*. Cambridge, Massachusetts/London, England: The MIT Press, 2014 and Bergermann, 'Un/Easy Resonance, the Critical Plural'.

act of imitative repetition in the human microphone, yet suggested that the process of hearing oneself and the other speaking postpones political positioning and encourages stepping out of one's preconceptions. Dyson differentiated between the virtual echo, which she considered shallow and reductive, and an embodied echo of physical presence such as the human microphone, which according to her rearticulates the commons. The notion of an activist or dissident echo is then examined via Spivak,[85] who analysed Ovid's tale arguing that Echo's repetition had a meaning of its own and marked a difference which disclosed the truth of self knowledge. This was my main inspiration for the title of the thesis—echoing with a difference—and in thinking of participatory curating as echoing the knowledge that an artist produces, which is by itself the echoing of the knowledge of a community.

The chapter ends with the case study *Preaching to the Choir*, an exhibition I curated in Harzlyia Museum, Israel (2015), with artistic formations of choirs from various political contexts, which make use of repetition, rehearsal and rearticulation, and manifest a conflictual, differential collectivity. I show how the clash between voice and text surfaces in many of the works, where deviant repetitions take shape in the form of reflexive displacements of certain texts and their rearticulation and exhaustion; the unintelligibility of the text becomes an uncanny reverberation of a traumatic loss, as language can no longer describe experience. As the governance of language is deconstructed, it amplifies the never-fixed formation of meaning and identity. This is one example of echoing with a difference, which disrupts commonly accepted constructs of identity, citizenship, nationality and collectivity.

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[85] Spivak, 'Echo'.

The sixth chapter delves into another case study from my own curatorial practice, *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, curated by Sarah Spies and myself, in Reading UK, in 2019. Here, choreography as a form of ordering of the subject, as well as a potential tool of dissent (Lepecki),[86] comes into the fore and corresponds with the duality of the voice as discussed previously. I examine various implications and manifestations of the terms 'commons' and 'commoning'(Hardin,[87] Ostrom,[88] Hardt and Negri,[89] De Angelis

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[86] Andre Lepecki, 'Movement in the Pause', Contactos Series,

https://contactos.tome.press/movement-in-the-pause/ Accessed September, 2021.

[87] Garrett Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science,* vol. 162, no. 3859 (1968)1243–1248.

[88] Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

[89] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*, (Cambridge MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009) p.viii.

and Stavrides,[90] Federici,[91]Sollfrank, Stalde and Neiderberger,[92]) as well as 'undercommons' (Stefano Harney and Fred Moten),[93] as inviting participation and collectivity but at the same time allowing refusal. I connect these notions to forms of subjugated and situated knowledges (Haraway)[94] in relation to embodied practice and research discussed in previous chapters. I continue to look at the reciprocal amplification between the curatorial and the artistic concepts and methods, as well as how these relations serve as a critical

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[90] Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides, 'On the Commons: A Public Interview', *e-flux Journal*, no. 17 (June, 2010), http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-publicinterview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/ http://www.e-flux.com/journal/on-the-commons-a-publicinterview-with-massimo-de-angelis-and-stavros-stavrides/ Accessed 30 May, 2023.

[91] Silvia Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Commons', Bollier and Helfrich eds, in *The Wealth of the Commons*, 48–49, first published in *The Commoner,* no.14 (2010) http://wealthofthecommons.org/essay/feminism-and-politics-commons Accessed 30 May, 2023 and

 Silvia Federici, 'Re-Enchanting the World: Technology, the Body, and the Construction of the Commons', in *Re-Enchanting the World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons*, (Oakland: PM Press, 2018), 188–197.

[92] Sollfrank et al, *Aesthetics of the Commons*

[93] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, 'The University and the Undercommons', in *The Undercommons, Fugitive Planning & Black Study*, (Minor Compositions: Wivenhoe / New York / Port Watson, 2013), 22–43.

[94] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'.

framework for the exploration of institution-curator-artist-participant relations. Examining uncommoning as a curatorial strategy leads to a definition of conflictual curating as preenactment, mediating and echoing antagonisms in order to invite futures that emphasise care, nonracist and nonviolent listening practices, while leaving room for differences.

In the seventh chapter, I return to the conflict of mediation and care versus provocation and antagonisms, via a conversation with Florian Malzacher and Jonas Staal. Examining antagonistic notions of assembly, we go back to *Truth is Concrete* (2012) and then focus on *Training for the Future* (2012).[95] The conversation and the concerns that it has raised serve as a bridge between the themes and methods that I engaged in as a curator in *(Un)Commoning* and in *Voice Over,* the last case study, where the silencing of the voice and the curtailing of movement met again. It is also one of many moments in which real politics—this time in the shape of the Covid-19 pandemic and the related civic

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[95] *Training for the Future* was held in September 2019 in the frame of Ruhr Triennale, curated by Florian Malzacher and Jonas Staal. The curatorial text described the project as follows:

Training for the Future is a utopian training camp where audiences become trainees in creating alternative futures, learning how to decolonise society, how to use extraterritorial waters for political action, create new forms of encryption, enact intergenerational climate justice, socialize artificial intelligence and campaign transnationally. Futurologists, progressive hackers, post-national activists, transnationalism, theatre makers, artists, and many others offer concrete exercises in alternatives to the present-day crisis within a training installation developed by artist Jonas Staal, situated in the Jahrhunderthalle Bochum. It seems a consensus today, that what is ahead of us can only be imagined as a disaster. Training for the Future instead aims to collectively reclaim the means of production of the future.

restrictions—interfered in the research, and, as previously described, exemplified, enhanced and further entangled the issues that were at hand.

The second part of the chapter focuses on the case study *Voice Over*, an exhibition I curated for the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht, Holland, in 2021, which I survey via a rendition of the works.[96] The exhibition dealt with physical exile, imposed as a form of control and categorisation, as well as with the silencing of voices that comes with this. The participating artists examined the agency of the human voice and its ability to infiltrate borders and alter preconceptions, but also how the voice is used to control and define borders. The exhibition's title played with the dual meaning of the term: it addressed the silencing of voices that has become more and more evident globally in the last decade, due to extreme nationalism, xenophobia and isolationism. At the same time, the term 'voiceover', meaning an invisible narrator's voice in a film, implies someone who is speaking on behalf of some else, hinting both to the marginalisation of certain voices in the political sphere, as well as to the risk of artists representing others and telling their story. The multiple meanings of the term 'voiceover' connect back to theories of the voice discussed in previous chapters, such as Chion's haunting acousmatic or Freud's repetitive uncanny, as well as to Haraway and Spivak's warnings regarding speaking on behalf of others. The works manifest how the voice and the body reverberate on the borders that control and define us while implying their potential breach.[97] As

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[96] Part of a conversation I had with artist Lawrence Abu Hamdan that places his work in the context of other subjects discussed in the thesis, is added as an appendix.

[97] The artists used poetry as a powerful tool to take apart the ordering and monitoring regime of the gaze, through the more abstract power of the human voice. As mentioned previously, LaBelle described the mouth as the place of creating oneself as a subject, as it is so radically connected to both language and the body—the

mentioned previously, LaBelle described the mouth as the place of creating oneself as a subject, as it is so radically connected to both language and the body—the place of constant struggle between the force of objectification and the demand for subjectivity. The works in *Voice Over* capture this place of tension, as they manifest acts of silencing and at the same time attempt to undermine them.

As in the other case studies, the artists in *Voice Over* reflect on their role as participation instigators and as political agents. They question whether they, as artists, can give a voice to those who are silenced, and expose the fractures and impossibilities of representing another. Examining the reverberating sphere between speaking and silencing, they ask who gives voice to whom; how can we really listen, and is this enough?[98]

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place of constant struggle between the force of objectification and the demand for subjectivity. The works in Voice Over capture this place of tension, as they manifest acts of silencing and at the same time attempt to undermine them. Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary*, (London and New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2014).

[98] It is worth mentioning that I do not regard *Voice Over* as one exhibition, and it continues to evolve though performative and participatory conferences, a format that I'm currently beginning to explore, but will not be able to address in this research. The first iteration was Curating on Shaky Grounds, a performative and participatory conference at the KW Berlin (2021), which I cocurated with Artis and OnCurating.

https://artis.art/public_programs/_curating_on_shaky

I will continue to explore the theme in Voice Over #2, in August 2023 at the KW Berlin, revisiting the meeting points between voices, bodies, borders and identity through live encounters. The encounters will take shape over the course of two days,

Chapter eight ends with an embodied account of my participation in documenta fifteen, curated by ruangrupa in Kassel, 2022. It reflects on the conflicts that arose and how those correspond with the subjects researched in this thesis, and most particularly on the challenge of participatory curating as it navigates between care and control, mediation and authority. Or, as aforesaid, between allowing, or even instigating a conflict and at the same time controlling its borders.

1.1 The Curatorial Voice, or What's So Great About Being the Keynote

There seem to be several inherent contradictions in the practice of curating participatory art: firstly, curating is (still) mostly considered a lonesome hierarchal position, despite recent tendencies towards collaboration and shared authorship.[99] As these tendencies developed alongside the new surge of participatory practices of the last decade, a shift has occurred in the expectations and understanding of the role of the curator: not only to construct, narrate and organise works and the narrative around them, but also to facilitate, enhance and resonate the voices of others.

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in various performative formats, where artists will act as both guests and hosts, intimating and politicising the voice- body tension. These curatorial speech acts will weave through and between each other, exploring forms of vocal identification, and the relationship between listening and speaking as the embodiment of struggle between objectification and subjectivity.

[99] I will expand later on some prominent examples of collaborative shared curatorial authorship, the latest of which is documenta fifteen (2022).

While being an artist who works with communities is complicated enough, as I will explain later, doing so as a curator seems to double the trouble; the curatorial voice and its relationship with the voices of others involved in these projects—artist, community, institution and audience—pose an entangled web of connections, agencies and agendas. These voices are often nonharmonious, even conflicting, raising questions regarding the agency of the curatorial voice: is the participatory curator expected to mediate not only between the artist, the institution and the audience, but also to represent and protect the needs of the involved community? What if this so-called community is a nonhomogeneous entity? How does an intense involvement of a curator impact both the ethics and the aesthetics of participatory projects? What forms of listening can a curator enable, to allow for a transformative experience for artist, community and audience?

The questions regarding the agency of the curatorial voice intensify when writing a thesis about participatory curatorial practices, as often these projects are ephemeral and lack substantial documentation. Some of these experiences exist for the long run only in the minds of those who took part in them. When writing this thesis, I attempted to reflect on the issues that I'm tackling not only by writing about them, but also by writing with them.[100] I attempted to let them write themselves, choosing their form and shifting from one chapter to the next. Rather than assuming my position and then proving it, I constructed my research from fragmentary memories of my own projects, interviews with

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[100] In a way that resonates Nancy's term, 'being with' others, which I will return to in the second chapter. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural,* trans. Robert D. Richardson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000 [1995]).

curators, artists and participants, supported by secondary sources of theoretical literature.

As this research focuses on participatory practices, one cannot discuss speech and voice without allowing a place for listening and silence. The question remains, how could a curator listen with care to the voices of others—particularly voices that are marginalised or silenced—without silencing her own voice? At the same time, how does one find her own keynote, after having practised being a moderator for so long?

1.2 Embodied Curating and Research

As aforesaid, my writing and method of research is inspired by a legacy of feminist thinkers, including contemporary peers that I have been privileged to learn from, who encourage an embodied, performative and at times personal position. This embodiment, however, is not centred around an individual ego or an autobiographical approach but looks to connect to other voices and bodies to create a collectivity of situated knowledge—a collectivity in the sense of relations and not as a loss of individual voices. In the upcoming chapters, I relate my work to the characteristics of embodiment in research and curation through Ulrike Bergermann's[101] contradictory account of participating in protests of the Occupy movement, and Irit Rogoff's[102] notions of 'smuggling' and 'embodied criticality' as a state of frustration and heightened awareness with transformative powers, among others. Recently, Rogoff has also raised the term 'the research turn' to discuss how research has turned from a

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[101] Bergermann, 'Un/Easy Resonance, the Critical Plural'.

[102] Rogoff, 'Smuggling—an Embodied Criticality'.

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contextual activity of inheriting knowledge, to a mode of inhabiting the world while working in precarious conditions; this in turn produces speculative research expressions that distance themselves from methods of scientific verification. This turn is related to a crisis mode, which among other manifestations, is characterised by the collapse of borders between the objective and subjective and between what is examined and who examines it. This form of 'becoming research', according to Rogoff, is holding evaluation accountable for adhering to true value and encouraging research to perform in the doing sense of the word, specifically from within its disrupted and disruptive state, and to use it to rework the conditions of the institutions of research from which the researchers operate.[103] In that sense, research becomes performative, in the same way that Austin's speech acts, which I discuss later in the thesis, are words that do something in the world.

My method of research is also kin to Marina Garcés' words in 'To Embody Critique', where she calls for intellectuals to get off their balconies in favour of an embodied relation to the world and to others through critique. In order to challenge the privatisation of our existence and search for the common, writes Garcés, we must, in a sort of paradox, start with our own experience. Her words also imply that our voices, as authors, intellectuals, and curators, and our bodies—the experiences they go through, the traumas they endure and the pleasures they engage in, the other bodies which they meet on the way, their interconnected movements and the moment in which they are curtailed—all

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[103] Based on her lecture in the conference Architecture as Education, Nottingham Contemporary, November 2019.
https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/keynote-irit-rogoff/

are intertwined in multiple ways.[104] Garcés' perspective connects with Gramsci's well-known definition of the organic intellectual, his quote opening the introduction of Sruti Bala's 'The Gestures of Participatory Art':[105] 'The mode of being an intellectual can no longer consist in eloquence, which is an exterior and momentary mover of feelings and passions, but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator.'[106]

While I focus on participatory curatorial practices manifested mostly though the voice, Bala reflexively looks at performative artistic utterances manifested through bodily gestures, where unexpected gestural audience reactions realign

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[104] Garces writes:

Nowadays, liberation has to do with our capacity to explore the networked link and fortify it: the links with a planet-world, reduced to an object of consumption, a surface of displacements and a depository of wastes; as well as the links with those 'Others" who, while always condemned to being 'other', have been evicted from the possibility to say 'we'. To combat impotence and embody critique then means to experience the 'we', and the 'world' that is amongst us. This is why the problem of critique is no longer a problem of conscience but of embodiment: it does not concern a conscience facing the world but rather a body that is in and with the world. This not only terminates the role of intellectuals and their balconies, of which we have already spoken, but also disposes of the mechanisms of legitimation of the intellectuals' word and their mode of expression.

Garcés, 'To Embody Critique: Some Theses: Some Examples'.

[105] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art*, 1.

[106] Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, eds. Q. Hoare and G. N. Smith (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1996).

the terms of participation. Bala writes, following Lehmann, that 'the turn away from the text is a turn towards the audience', stepping away from the authority of the narrative, as a sort of performative twist to Barth's death of the author.[107] Relating to the performative turn as diverting from text and language towards embodied knowledge and practice, she defines the gesture as 'situated between image, speech and action'; thus, she claims, it responds to the usual problematics of participation research, as either attempting to measure impact or to define formal aesthetic attributes.[108] However, she acknowledges the inherent difficulty of writing about these disruptive gestures, as they rise from the impossibility of their discursive iteration.[109] Further challenges in embodied research of participation relate to the relations between the researcher and the researched, when the researcher participates in the work, steps outside her comfort zone and writes from her own subjective experience. Alternatively, she asks how a researcher should access a work she did not participate in and what parts of the work should be researched and how, when the important process as well as the sociopolitical aftereffects are often undocumented. 'Methodology', writes Bala, 'is thus not a technical, ancillary task to the main problem of rethinking the concept of participation, but profoundly tied to its theoretical assumptions and axiological visions.'[110]

Without over simplifying the poetic complexities and juxtapositions put forth by Bala, I would like to gently mark my own difference when echoing her research:

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[107] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art,* 11.

[108] Ibid., 15.

[109] Ibid., 21.

[110] Ibid., 23.

while Bala looks at what lies between an image and an act,[111] my own research attempts to move through and beyond the spectatorial and into the sonic, to find the participatory in the qualities of the audible and the inaudible (without essentialising the realm of the audible over the visible). In addition, shifting the focus to the discourse of the curatorial, from an artist directing a participating audience to a curator-mediator-instigator with a multileveled community of participants, I attempt to push further the dichotomic definitions of either objective research or subjective personal memoirs, as I will soon explain further. The character of curatorial work already invites entangled research that holds both ends of the stick.

My work also has a strong affinity to Lauren Fournier's concept of autotheory,[112] in its mix of theory and autobiography and its entanglement between the personal and the political, between research and artistic creation, and mostly in its ambivalent conflictual relation towards these entanglements. As Fournier wrote: 'Autotheory reveals the tenuousness of maintaining illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self, research and motivation, just as feminist artists and scholars have long argued.'[113] Fournier gives an in-depth analysis of how autotheory relates to the history of feminist writing and activism and also how it is a contemporary field of its own; how it is different from other related forms such as the memoir, autobiography or autoethnography, and why it is still subject to criticism as being narcissistic or unreliable when coming from women or people of

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[111] Ibid., 17.

[112] Fournier, *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism*.

[113] Ibid., 2–3.

colour,[114] a question which is entangled in 'colonial, white-centric and patriarchal histories'.[115] At the same time, she considers both the limits and the possibilities of this form in today's hypercapitalist world, in relation to Trumpian post-truth, social media confessions, #MeToo, woke politics and notions of decolonisation.[116] Fournier suggests thinking of autotheory as activist practice, as a sort of resistance through self-reflexivity on embodied experiences, particularly for groups which have been marginalised through history such as women, queer people and people of colour, and open up affinities across communities. The self-reflection inherent to autotheory could be utilised to question who has access to knowledge in the first place, particularly to the kind of knowledge considered reliable over the years and defined as 'theory' by

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[114] Fournier says:

One of the most noticeable ways in which the autotheoretical turn is tied to histories of feminist practice is the simple fact that feminist artists continually face the charge of narcissism when they incorporate themselves in direct ways into their work (and feminists themselves are not immunefrom launching such critiques). One of the reasons why work by women and artists of color is particularly vulnerable to charges of narcissism is that women and racializised people have been historically overdetermined by their bodies—in contrast, always, to the supposedly neutral standard of the white, cisgender man. With the leftover hold of Cartesian dualisms, this tends to lead to the bias (unconscious or otherwise). that women are either intelligent and critical or embodied and sexual; philosophically savvy or naively navel-gazing. This has led to the creation of autotheoretical work by feminists that responds to such oppositions.

Ibid., 43.

[115] Ibid., 6.

[116] Ibid., 3.

academics and philosophers. Autotheory makes room for knowledge that is not authoritarian-objective, such as situated or indigenous knowledge, as I'll explore later via Spivak,[117] Haraway,[118] Moten and Harney[119] and others who themselves criticise philosophy, theory and academia in their claims to absolute truth.[120] Fournier's approach is relevant to my work in terms of both the discussion of personal-theoretical entanglement, and in my attempts to have the research methodology resonate the content and context, whether through intuitive and confessional forms of writing or via conversations and collaborations with peers and friends, having their work seep into mine and vice versa. In this way, what at first might seem anecdotal, over time builds its own inner logic. In that sense this could be defined as performative writing, and indeed Fournier relates the contemporary autotheory impulse to 'the discursive shift towards affect and performativity'. As in Judith Butler's definition of performativity, identity is thus constituted through doing and embodied in and as theory; it does not preexist.[121] When writing from the point of view of the curatorial, the question of gendered attitudes to research, or how women are professionally perceived, makes autotheory particularly relevant as a reflexive format, as I will soon show. As the looped feedback between theory and

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[117] Spivak, 'Echo'.

[118] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and thePrivilege of Partial Perspective'.

[119] Harney and Moten, 'The University and the Undercommons'.

[120] Ibid., 46–48.

[121] Fournier quotes Anna Poletti in regard to constituting life through the act of writing rather than merely describing it, so that writing becomes performative in the Butlerian sense (which I'll discuss later in the thesis). Ibid., 16–18.

practice is also inherent to curating, this thesis is a multi-layered self-reflection: by rearticulating my practice in retrospect through writing, I recreate the relations that have constituted my identity from memory,[122] conversations, readings, quotes and images, in order to render what I consider to be a participatory form of curating, writing and thinking.

1.3 Embodied Curating as Echoing With Difference

How does a curatorial voice search for embodied collectivity? In terms of writing and research methodology, as previously mentioned, I shift between recollecting memories from curating participatory projects to my embodied experience of participating in other participatory curatorial endeavours. In terms of secondary sources, I choose, on the one hand, texts that make a bridge between theory and practice, or in other words, texts that could be used as guides to participatory, political, or performative curating— such as Oliver Marchart's *Conflictual Esthetics*, Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells* or Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces*. On the other hand, I choose texts that can provide a poetic reflection on my own writing—on the paradoxical act of attempting to write an authoritative account of a practice that decentralises and undermines authority, or of expressing an individual voice within manifestations of collectivity. In this category, I have found two texts particularly significant:

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[122] 'Memory is associated with the genre of memoir, while performative writing approaches memory with a reflexive sense of instability and play. In performative writing, the writer's memory of their lived experience is one material among others, like the theory and artworks and literary texts they reference.' Ibid., 16.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's 'Echo'[123] and Donna Haraway's 'Situated Knowledges'.[124]

Spivak's 'Echo' explores the empowering potential in echoing others as a form of creating difference; in that sense, if we playfully think of Echo as a curator and Narcissus as an artist,[125] I see participatory curating not as a simple echoing of others but as an interpretation and reverberation with differences; a way of making something known by mirroring it, while providing nuanced subversions to its reflection. Spivak's feminist and postcolonial reading of Echo also connects to how women and non- Western individuals have been perceived by society as unreliable, their knowledge not considered valid.[126] Through this, I reflect on the resonance of my own voice in curating and in research, as well as on how I engage with others in forms of participatory curating and research.

In 'Situated Knowledges', Donna Haraway calls for embodied accounts of the truth that regain agency through the subjectivity of collective historical accounts, rather than the all-encompassing self-proclaimed objectivity of science. From Haraway, I borrow the term 'reasonance', following a neologism

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[123] Spivak, 'Echo', 218.

[124] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective', 575–599, 577.

[125] I'm not implying here that artists are narcissists, but borrowing Spivak's examination of the making of Narcissus and Echo as a metaphor for hegemonic Western patriarchal concepts, as I'll specify later, and for my own purposes I situate the curator in the place of Echo.

[126] I will return to this through writings of Fred Moten and Harney as well as Foucault and Haraway.

she casually uses, a hybrid of reason and resonance. Resonance is a phenomenon in which a vibrating system or external force drives another system to vibrate with greater amplitude. To reason is to try to understand and argue a certain point. I play with this combination of reason and resonance to rethink the act of curating as performatively reverberating knowledge.

An embodied form of curating is one that is always in flux. As curating is mediating between an artist's radical uttering and an institution or audience, any attempt to structure or institute these uttering compromises its radicality. This inherent contradiction in the very act of curating is looked at in this thesis from multiple perspectives—among them Oliver Marchart's definition of conflictual curating,[127] Judith Butler's theory on assembly[128] and Irit Rogoff's embodied criticality,[129] as well through my retrospective look at the case studies. As I will further elaborate in the upcoming chapters, for me the act of curating in a manner which is political, performative and participatory is found precisely within the problem of instituting and the challenges of mediation; in other words, in the liminal sphere between enabling a conflict to take place and perform its critical positionalities, but at the same time maintaining its borders so it doesn't get out of hand and become hurtful or abusive. Being in this liminal sphere requires reflexivity, intent listening and the ability to embrace failure. A participatory curator would function as a double agent—both collaborator and traitor—and constantly examine and stretch the borders of her practice and the character of her alliances. This is an essential part of curating as echoing with a difference: with a research methodology that echoes the curatorial

[127] Marchart, 'Conflictual Aesthetics'.

[128] Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly.*

[129] Rogoff, 'Smuggling—an Embodied Criticality'.

methodology, which in turn echoes the artworks and the tactics of the involved artists, the conflicts at hand are always shifting, and their constant resonance prevents them from being instituted. From this perspective, although the thesis locates itself within the curatorial and theoretical discourse, its bedrock is the artworks and their methods. However, this doesn't mean that the curatorial agency needs to be hidden, on the contrary. Focusing on it acknowledges its problematics and opens up a critical sphere.

1.4 The Conflict of Gendered Curatorial Roles

The notion of embodied research and curating and its related intimate reflexivity, is tied to the contested territory in which personal accounts in research still function.[130] This perception could also be found in a gender biased understanding of curating, where the male curator is perceived as having authority and agency and the woman curator is considered mediator to the genius of artists.

Dorothee Richter wrote about the patriarchal concept of male authoritative curatorship in regard to Herald Zeeman, one of the first well-known figures of the independent curator, via how he positioned himself in Documenta 5 as a

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[130] As Fournier describes in her various writings, this is true also for other forms of artistic expression. In her book about autobiographical performances as acts of resistance, Deirde Heddon also wrote how Irene Gammel describes the danger of the confessional form for women: when personal experiences are expressed with the female voice, they are perceived as informal and lacking authority. Deirdre Heddon, 'Autobiography and Performance: Performing Selves', *Macmillan International Higher Education*, 2007, 4.

sort of god.[131] Perhaps as an opposition to the framing of the independent curator as an authority that undermines artistic authority, another prevailing perception of curating relates to care, but unsurprisingly, it has its own problematic origins. In relation to another curatorial approach to Documenta, that of Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev for dOCUMENTA (13), Nanna Buurman wrote about the connection between traditional expectations of women, or perceptions of femininity, and how they relate to a widespread understanding of curatorial codes of conduct. 'Beyond the shared etymology of care work and curating in the Latin curare ('care'),' writes Buurman, 'they have in common an emphasis on modesty, restraint, and the negation of authorship, as well as an emancipatory historical trajectory from behind the scenes to centre stage.'[132]

Buurman exemplifies how in perceptions of curatorial care, the autonomy and authority of artists was made possible by the invisible care labours of women,

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[131] Richter says:

> I will follow in this paragraph an argument, that Beatrice von Bismarck has developed: the pose adopted by Harald Szeemann on the last day of Documenta 5 established the occupational image of the authorial curator as an autonomous and creative producer of culture, who organized exhibitions independently of institutions… Seen thus, Harald Szeemann's pose is a distinctive positioning, based on historical schemata, especially of the curator as a god/king/man among artists.

Dorothee Richter, 'Artists and Curators as Authors – Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers?'.

[132] Buurman, 'Angels in the White Cube—Rhetoric of Curatorial Innocence at dOCUMENTA (13)', 146–162.

in the same manner to which housekeeping is the invisible labour that provides man's independence.[133]

The juxtaposition of forms of curatorial care with what is expected from women as mediators and facilitators poses potential dangers: a curator could suppress her own voice to amplify the voices of others, or mix between avoiding conflicts and care. In that sense, I suggest the notion of participatory curating as one that could potentially undermine these two cliches of the contemporary curator––on one hand, the image of the authoritative creator, usually male, that

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[133] Buurmann writes:

> The ideology of the white cube, which veils curatorial agency in favour of a purported autonomy of the artworks, thus corresponds with nineteenth-century ideals of pure femininity, personified by the Victorian Angel in the House, who was expected to perform her domestic duties quietly to provide the backdrop for her husband to stage himself as the head of the house. Still today, the figure of the Angel in the House, famously criticized by Virginia Woolf (1942), has its counterparts in curators who modestly declare their innocence. In a manner befitting the Victorian ideal of the desexualized hostess and mother, who labours invisibly in the background to care for her loved ones and guests, curators of all genders claim that they merely prepare the stage for the artists as the protagonists and do not have any authorial ambitions of their own. This conception of non-authorial curatorial agency sometimes even manifests itself in generalizing normative codes of modesty. In 1978, for example, the curator Alanna Heiss observed: 'While the demands of art centered on the meaningful expression of the self, the demands of curating predominantly included the ability to absent the self, to provide the neutrality of context necessary to artists and audience.'

Ibid., 146.

competes with the perception of the genius artist, and on the other hand with the perception of a (usually female) curator as a mediator and caretaker meant to facilitate the artworks or artists and nothing more. It is interesting in this regard to think about the conflict of the curator between being the authoritative voice, and to being a caretaker, and between making their voice heard, to listening and resonating the voices of others. The cliched perspectives on 'male' and 'female' voices both live side by side within the role of the curator, constantly fighting each other, and for me the meaningful understandings that come from curating, are found exactly in this liminal sphere of antagonistic discursivity.

In this regard I find kinship in the research of Elke Krasny,[134] who weaves the roles of the curator-carer with that of the curator-author in ways that draw relationships between participation, collaboration, conflictuality and feminism, and call for a political agency found in the entanglements between these two positions. Krasny identifies a conversational turn in curating in the second half

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[134] Almost a decade ago Elke Krasny invited me, at the time a young curator working at the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv, to speak in a conference she curated as part of her research, How to Identify with Difference? Doing Art in the Public Realm, Kunstraum Nieder sterreich, Vienna, 30 January, 2013. Other invited speakers included Ines Doujak, artist, Vienna; Amelia Jones, art historian, curator, Montreal; Elke Krasny, curator and cultural theorist, Vienna; Suzana Milevska, curator, Skopje; and Mechtild Widrich, art historian, Zurich. Dorothee Richter, who was the PhD advisor of Krasny and myself, has taken part in other conferences curated by Krasney as part of this series, and I thank both of them deeply for their inspiration, their trust and confidence, and for the opportunity to (temporarily) close this circle of thoughts by acknowledging the relations of their long term engagement with feminist histories, thoughts and collaborations, to my own research.

of the 1990s, manifested in both small discussions and large-scale marathons. However, this turn was not theorised in relation to a long history of 'the feminization of conversation as an intellectual, artistic and political practice'.[135]

In her PhD dissertation and the book that followed, Krasny researched Judy Chicago's *Dinner Party* (1979) within a lineage of feminist curatorial thought, related to the woman-led Jewish salon culture around 1800 in Vienna, where the *salonnières* were curators of conversations.[136] Krasny placed Chicago's conversation-based methods directly in the realms of conflictual participation, by looking at the historical division between art production and reception as a gendered one, introducing the concept of an 'emancipated spectatress'.[137] In addition, her perspective takes in the connections as well as the differences between the individual and the collective in feminist thought.[138] Through Krasny's research perspective, as well as her practical curatorial project which turned *The Dinner Party*'s telegram messages into an archive, Chicago's project became not merely an art work but a form of embodied curatorial

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[135] Krasny, 'The Salon Model: The Conversational Complex in Feminism and Art History Now', 147–16, 147.

[136] In her examination of *The Dinner Party*, Krasny emphasised the significance of the messages that the two thousand women who participated in the work telegrammed to the museum, messages that Chicago turned into a map as part of the installation. This map, claimed Krasny, signifies the entanglements of these feminist thinkers and practitioners within their specific historical conditions and power relations.

[137] Elke Krasny, *Archive, Care, and Conversation: Suzanne Lacy's International Dinner Party in Feminist Curatorial Thought,* (Zurich: OnCurating.org, 2020), 8.

[138] Ibid., 10.

research, where its embedded collectivity of feminist thought was further made legible by Krasny's framing.

Krasny emphasises the blurring of boundaries between the personal or domestic space and the public in this project;[139] a tendency that is seen in other forms of feminist embodied research as well.[140] In addition, she stresses the

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[139] Not only in the sense of it being structured as a dinner party, a traditionally domestic event hosted by women, but through the multiple threads of publicness made possible by the participants of the event and their forms of conversation: the participation of activist women from outside the art world,   who made public the private support structures that made their work possible, as well as the means of communication through telegram cables that were considered a private form of communication. Ibid,, 11.

[140] As I mentioned before and will further emphasise, examples include Garces' 'To Embody Critique' and Bala's 'The Gestures of Participatory Art', where the personal experience of a researcher as a participant become an integral part of the research, and Haraway in 'Situated Knowledges' who insists on the significance of both situatedness and the collectivity of knowledge. Even Spivak's 'Echo' in this regard could be read as a poetic take on the importance of conversation with others even when the conditions seem to prevent it, or to how an infatuation could lead to a transference of knowledge rather than to self-deprecation. Other examples of embodied research in feminist thought that are concerned with the collapse between the personal and professional are not the focus of my research but are worth mentioning here, for example Jane Thompson's 'Me and My Shadow' (1987), or, more recently, Natalie S. Loveless's 'Reading with Knots', on Jane Gallop's anecdotal theory, which describes the paradox of writing from a standpoint of the first person, whereas the authority of the witness is undone by its very singularity. Specifically, from a feminist perspective, she writes how Gallop's text challenges the divide between feeling and thought: 'Entangling the personal and the political with

importance of situated knowledge as a key to the project's international scope and translates this to a curatorial method of working with others as conversation.[141]

Krasny points out that Tony Bennet's exhibitionary complex, based on Foucault's reading of Jeremy Bentham's writing on the penal system, describes a vertical axis of power, while 'the conversational complex is based upon horizontality and relationality.'[142] She demonstrates, via Leela Gandhi, that a different reading of Bentham, not one based on gender bias, could connect a perception of the curator as carer to that of the curator as author, derived from

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the pedagogical, Feminist Accused argues for an inhabited responsiveness, where the stuff of theory and the stuff of life uncannily oscillate between scenes of legitimation: scenes of the proper and improper, the theoretical and the "merely anecdotal".'

Natalie S. Loveless, 'READING WITH KNOTS, On Jane Gallop's Anecdotal Theory', *Journal of the Jan van Eyck Circle for Lacanian Ideology Critique 4* (2011), 26; Jane Tompkins, 'Me and My Shadow', *New Literary History,* vol. 19, no. 1, *Feminist Directions* (Autumn, 1987), The Johns Hopkins University Press, 169–178.

[141] Krasny speaks about the etymology of the word 'conversation', when conversation is read via its Latin root, meaning 'contact, moral conduct and a way of living',' conducting one's life with a turn to others. In addition she mentions the relationship between the word 'conversation' and to Nancy's referencing of words beginning with 'co' as describing a plural creation, such as community, communism, and collaboration. From an examination of the various forms and levels of participation manifested in the dinner party, Krasny explained how they led to 'co-implication, co-dependence, and co-emergence', and probed what this collectivity implied regarding the role of curators as carers rather than as authors. Ibid., 12–15.

[142] Ibid., 15.

the Latin word *curare* which 'translates into care, service, maintenance, healing, management, organisation, procurement, provision, and distribution of resources.' In this perception the bureaucratic aspects of curating are treated with the same importance as the authorial ones.[143]

The curator-author model is based after the artist-genius model, a model which left women artists outside of its boundaries. The dissociation between curating and care thus, according to Krasny, stems from the fear of the feminised association of care work.

1.5 Curating Relations

As aforesaid, a curator needs to answer to the rules and requirements of the institution she works with, a position which might clash with the care aspects of curating. The conflict between care and control, related to the problem of instituting discussed previously, is an inherent part of the curatorial function.[144]

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[143] Ibid., 15.

[144] David Levi Strauss quoted Herald Szeeman who said that a curator is an 'administrator, amateur, author of introductions, librarian, manager and accountant, animator, conservator, financier and diplomat'. Strauss also explained that the role of the curator developed from overseeing sanitation, transportation, and even policing during the Roman Empire, to being a clergyman with a spiritual charge during the Middle Ages. Thus, the split between control and curing was always part of the role. As he put it, 'curators have always been a curious mixture of bureaucrat and priest.' He asked whether exhibitions are 'spiritual undertakings with the power to conjure alternative ways of organizing society, or vehicles for cultural tourism and nationalistic propaganda.'

Levi Strauss, 'The Bias of the World, Curating After Szeeman & Hopps'.

This clash becomes more acute when it comes to curating participatory art, where the caring is not only for artworks or artists but also for the participants.[145]

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[145] Kate Fowle expanded on the concept of curating as presiding over something—a hierarchical position between care and control—through Michel Foucault and his examination of medical institutions for those deemed insane as places of confinement rather than of care. She compared this to the function of art institutions as being more about the governing of culture than about its preservation and presentation, as many of them have been funded and run by the government and state. Thus, the curator is supposed to propagate taste and knowledge for the public good and her role expands beyond overseeing to what Foucault calls 'the cultivation of the self.' Fowle wrote:

> It could be said that the role of the curator has shifted from a governing position that presides over taste and ideas to one that lies amongst art (or object), space, and audience. The motivation is closer to the experimentation and inquiry of artists' practices than to the academic or bureaucratic journey of the traditional curator.' Fowle also describes the changes to what is considered a curatorial project today, which could be anything from performances, radio broadcasts, outdoor installations or residencies, and rather than focusing on presentation they expand their spatial parameters into public and virtual realms and experiment with the role of the public in 'completing' an artwork. However, while this description correlates with curating practices such as relational aesthetics, it still doesn't entail the complexity of curating participatory art.

Kate Fowle, 'Who Cares'.

Another more recent example for the shift in the perception of the role of the curator, example the information on the Post Graduate Program in Curating, Zurich

This connects to the curatorial turn as a relational practice, a concept developed by Beatrice von Bismarck,[146] Paul O'Neil,[147] Irit Rogoff[148] and others, in conjunction with theories of performative curating such as Dorothea von Hantelmann's *The Experiential Turn*[149] and Maria Lind's performative curating.[150] These theories mark a shift in the perception of curatorial methodology that allows flexibility in content, understanding that exhibitions should be constantly in flux even after their mounting, and encouraged the development of platforms that bypass the rigidity of exhibition and allow for discursivity and embodiment to happen in many forms.

University of the Arts (ZHdK) and Reading University, in the frame of which this thesis was written:

The Programme focuses less on the 'genius concept' of the exhibition planner as individual author—a highly controversial topic since the 1990s—than on cooperative, interdisciplinary working methods, as employed, for example, in film productions or nongovernment organisations. Exhibition-making/curating means the creation of innovative structures for the presentation of cultural artefacts through interdisciplinary collaboration.

https://www.curating.org/information/

[146] Von Bismarck et al., *Cultures of the Curatorial.*

[147] For example in Paul O'Neill, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2012).

[148] For example in Irit Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field'*,* in *The Curatorial. A Philosophy of Curating,* Jean-Paul Martinon (ed) (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 41-48.

[149] Von Hantelmann, 'The Experiential Turn'.

[150] Maria Lind, *Performing the Curatorial Within and Beyond Art.*

Beatrice von Bismarck defined the curatorial turn as blurring divisions between professions, disciplines and roles, which widened the scope of curating beyond putting things together and presenting them to 'enabling, making public, educating, analyzing, criticizing, theorizing, editing, and staging.'[151] Thus the curatorial is not only a form of mediation, but a field of knowledge that relates to the condition of appearance of art and culture. These conditions relate particularly to globalisation and the growing precarity of labour, and the relation of the curatorial to them has infused the field with contemporary sociopolitical relevance that it did not obtain before. The curatorial in this context is a dynamic constellation of objects, people and information, constantly in motion, where a process-oriented approach reflects on their subject and object positioning. On a practical level this definition suggests treating exhibitions as temporary constellations, always in a state of becoming and site specific, and reflexively mixing methods from institutional critique with those of new institutionalism. From this perspective, the curatorial is inherently equipped to reflect upon its own operating mode and to establish a nonhierarchical relation with theory.[152]

For Rogoff, the curatorial is the event of knowledge. Rogoff wrote that while there is an ongoing demand to constantly define the curatorial as well as to produce coherent products in the form of an exhibition, it is important to keep things unfixed and unknown, without conclusion, but rather to speculate and draw relations, to enact knowledge rather than to illustrate it: 'If curating can be the site of knowledge to rehearse its crises, then it has the potential to make a contribution rather than enact representation.'[153] This idea of a field of

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[151] Bismark, *Cultures of the Curatorial*, 8.

[152] Ibid., 8–13.

[153] Rogoff, 'The Expanding Field'*,* 45.

knowledge rehearsing its own crisis as a performative and activist act, resonates with my own perspective on curatorial preenactment, which I'll return to later in the thesis.

Sternfeld and Ziaja describe the concept of the curatorial as related to a reflexive turn and to questions of curatorial agency, encouraging new types of exhibitions where things are '"taking place" rather than "being shown".'[154] In what they defined as a prerequisite for postrepresentational curating,[155] they emphasised a radically altered relation to the role of the viewer in the 1980s, towards the participatory, effected by collective acts by artists such as Group Material or Martha Rosler:

> In contrast to the modernist contemplative mode of reception the viewer is not only directly addressed and challenged to react but in a much earlier state of a project invited to become an intrinsic, defining part of it. This radical turn from instruction to participation characterizes a new

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[154] Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, 'What Comes After the Show? On Post-representational Curating', 22.

[155] In regards to the development of institutional critique as a reflexive and critical practice, and its failures in providing an actual activist alternative, Sternfeld and Zaja offer the 'post-representational' as a concept of intervention into classical curatorial tasks: 'This implies a revision of the role of history and research, of organizing, creating a public and education. This will be done from three agency-oriented perspectives: Performing the Archive, Curating as Organizing and Turning to the Educational, which together open up a yet unfinished catalogue of criteria for post-representative curating.' Ibid., 21–24.

notion of the viewer that Suzana Milevska termed a 'paradigm shift from objects to subjects'.[156]

1.6 Curatorial Care Revisited

The theories revolving around the notion of the curatorial, developed between 2012 and 2014, reflect a shift in the perception of the role of the curator towards a more relational and participatory approach. At the same time, another shift has occurred, relating to the widespread protest movements that brought about a vast awakening of political awareness, In particular, it was characterised by criticism towards hypercapitalism, economic inequality and precarious labour conditions, as well as a heightened sensitivity and reclaimed agency for groups who suffer violence and discrimination; this shift has ignited a search for new methods of commoning, collaboration and cross-movement solidarity that in turn further effected the realm of participatory art and curating.

Within these changes, which I will further elaborate on, the most recent discourse on curatorial care, from a feminist perspective, points to how the notion of curatorial care could be problematic in an arena of precarious neoliberal labour conditions.[157] For example, as Helenna Reckitt defined the practitioners interested in this perspective:

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[156] Ibid., 22–23.

[157] Some of my PhD program peers, such as Sascia Bailer, Katalin Erdodi and Hadas Kedar, develop their own perspectives on relationality, care and collaboration from different perspectives, and their research projects will be published in proximity to mine.

Rejecting the domineering model of curator as author, the initiators of such projects locate themselves as mediators working within a relational network. This more collaborative approach to curatorial practice foregrounds vulnerability, co-dependence, resisting the performance of professionalism that works to the detriment of arts workers' and their collaborators' wellbeing.[158]

Within this nuanced perspective of curatorial care, it seems that when working with participatory art, it becomes even more complex: a curator needs to care for an entire community, with needs and wishes that might not match with how the curator or the artist imagined them. In addition, the roots of participatory and community-based practices are usually planted in an activist agenda and a wish, to put it naively, to change the world for the better. Thus, one might say, that a curator of participatory practices is not just a person who cares, but a caring person. And as such, being stuck in between the needs of an institution, which are often based on economic factors and/or subjected to political agendas, to those of a community and an artist, is not an easy place to be. The art institutions, even the more socially oriented ones, usually opt for an exhibition with concrete objects in a concrete space; exhibitions are a way to expose themselves to a larger audience that brings in more money and funding. Thus, participatory projects often end up with an aesthetic outcome in the form of art objects, not because this is the best format to represent their process, but to comply with the accepted forms of representation for a

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[158] Helena Reckitt, keynote lecture, 'Curating and/as Care', *New Alphabet School #4 Caring*. Haus der

Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany 12 June 2020.
https://research.gold.ac.uk/id/eprint/29594/

bourgeois audience. At other times, they are co-opted as a form of community reach for museums to engage audiences, or as public art festivals, without thoroughly thinking about the power relations between all the parties involved.

There are few museums that maintain a long-term involvement of communities in a way which is both inherently political and activist in aim, as well as artistically and academically reflexive. This is usually the territory of more experimental nonprofit organisations.[159] This relates to the problematics of art institutions that are perceived as elitist spheres even (or maybe especially) when attempting to exhibit social or political issues. Tonny Bennet wrote that:

> they [museums] play a part in the distribution of the freedom through which liberal forms of government are organized, according to a capacity for free and reflexive forms of self-government to some sections of the populations they connect with while at the same time denying such capacities to others.[160]

As curators who aspire to be political and instigate change, I dare to say that all of us wonder at times whether we are just 'preaching to the choir': whether

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[159] A couple of examples of museums that do spotlight these practices are the Van Aben Museum in Eindhoven, Netherlands, or the Queens Museum in New York, and there are more in various geographical contexts, but this is not my main focus here.

[160] Tony Bennett, 'Thinking (with) Museums. From Exhibitionary Complex to Governmental Assemblage', in *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies*, volume 1- *Museum Theory*, eds. Kylie Message and Andrea Witcomb(Wiley & sons, 2015), 16. Quoted by Ronald Kolb, 'The Curating of Self and Others—Biennials as Forms of Governmental Assemblages', *OnCurating*, no. 46, June, 2020 https://www.on-curating.org/issue-46-reader/the-curating-of-self-and-others-biennials-as-forms-of-governmental-assemblages.html#.YBK0FWSA524

our voices, and the voices of the artists and communities we work with, only reach certain audiences that are already convinced, or do they manage to make a bigger impact? Do we plant seeds for a future revolution that will eventually come, even if we will never know who started it? Should we be blunt and provocative to send a widespread message, or should we be nuanced and sophisticated? Staying under the radar could be a good tactic to protect our collaborators and ourselves from being censored, silenced, or worse. But then again, being subtle is not the way to be heard.

1.7 The Sounds of Silence: Historical and Political Background

In my native country, Israel, and in many other countries worldwide, the attempt to govern culture and to censor critical voices becomes more and more evident. Curators are often torn between the wish to remain independent from catering to the fears of the institutions, and the need to fund their projects, which will seldom come to light without institutional support. The more extreme and limited the political climate becomes, the fewer are the chances to get independent funding for critical projects that allow silenced voices to be heard. In terms of Israel, there is also the BDS.[161] According to its guidelines, an artist,

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[161] The cultural boycott is part of a larger call for Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) meant to raise international awareness of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and other human rights violations against Palestinians, and consequently generate pressure on Israel to end them. Within the boycott category are four calls: academic, cultural, military (weapons embargo), and economic (boycotting Israeli products or companies, or those specifically from the Occupied Territories). Divestment, similar to the economic boycott, calls for investors to remove their funds from Israeli investments; and sanctions refer to political and juridical penalties against Israel.

curator, or institution who supports the boycott should not work in Israel or use any Israeli affiliated funding (private or public, including abroad). At the same time, in Israel, the governmental funding is bluntly declaring its censorial boundaries, and art works which have been deemed as provocative or supposedly insensitive to certain communities have been removed. This has become an efficient tool by right wing activists and politicians in drawing their own borders regarding the freedom of speech and placing pressure on artists and curators to play along and self-censor, or else they will be cut off from funding. At times, institutions and individuals refuse to work with Israeli artists and curators, whether in Israel or abroad, regardless of the funding, even though this was not originally part of the guidelines of the BDS movement; this prevents many political or critical projects relating to Israel from coming to light or being seen by both local and international audiences. The possibilities to act politically as an Israeli in the frame of the art world are continuously narrowing.[162]

Chen Tamir, 'A Report on the Cultural Boycott of Israel', *I Can't Work Like This, A Reader on Recent Boycotts And Contemporary Art*, eds. Joanna Warsza and participants of the Salzburg International Summer Academy of Fine Arts Berlin 2017. Tamir's report was first published in *Hyperallergic* on 3 February, 2015: https://hyperallergic.com/179655/a-report-on-the-cultural-boycott-of-israel/ Accessed 2 April 2023.

[162] Chen Tamir wrote in her report that 'both the academic and the cultural boycotts target institutions, and not individuals (except in cases in which an individual is representing an institution or acting in an official capacity)', and explained further in the footnote:

> Anchored in precepts of international law and universal human rights, the
> BDS movement, including PACBI, rejects on principle boycotts of individuals

Ironically, this silences the more critical voices, for example of curators who want to work with more political artists and expose Israeli audiences to content that might affect their perspective or encourage them to act. It also prevents most attempts at collaboration between Israeli and Palestinian artists or curators, as understandably there is a fear of normalisation of the occupation through initiatives of so-called dialogue.

From a personal standpoint, the BDS movement, whose goal to end the occupation I fully support, poses a particular paradox for me: while the aim of many of my projects is to shift power relations and affect for the better the

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based on their identity (such as citizenship, race, gender, or religion) or opinion. Mere affiliation of Israeli cultural workers to an Israeli cultural institution is therefore not grounds for applying the boycott. If, however, an individual is representing the state of Israel or a complicit Israeli institution, or is commissioned/recruited to participate in Israel's efforts to 'rebrand' itself, then her/his activities are subject to the institutional boycott the BDS movement is calling for.

Ibid., 36.

However, Tamir sensed that this might get complicated, when she wrote that as occasions of high profile boycotts against Israeli funding increase, biennials may think twice before inviting Israeli artists (Ibid., 51). And indeed, as the years passed by from 2017, the year of this report, there have been more instances in which a silent, undeclared boycott, has been cast on Israeli artists and curators, regardless of institutional affiliation or funding, and motivated decisions not to include them in various projects—even for the mere fact that this is 'too much of a headache', as I was told by a friend. Since this boycott is silent and undeclared it is hard to give specific proven examples, but I will return to this subject in my concluding chapter about documenta fifteen, which had a controversy around this subject.

suffering of communities who experience limitations on freedom of speech, freedom of movement, as well as discrimination and violence, my affiliation with local institutional support and funding turns me in the eyes of some of my potential collaborators into an accomplice of these very crimes. I respect this position, and the silence that it brings with it, but at the same time I often long to listen to and speak with other voices, some less privileged than mine, in order not to speak on their behalf, and this conversation is hard to come by. This leaves me at times in the position of speaking from the point of view of the hegemony, or even of the perpetrator, a position that I'm interested in as well, as a form of antagonistic stance that provokes thought. At the same time, I strive to find parallel routes, through long-term dialogues based on attentive listening that could lead to mutual trust, and I deeply thank and appreciate those who do chose to trust me in these precarious conditions. Sometimes I feel like a double agent, attempting to infiltrate through the cracks in the system. This is also why the more antagonistic or conflictual participatory projects appeal to me, but at the same time I'm sensitive to their ethical challenges, and care about the well being of all involved.

This seeming contradiction is a repeating issue throughout my thesis and stands in the heart of curating participatory practices: the clash between encouraging conflicts and exposing hidden power relations—with their provocative nature, the discomfort they can cause to both participants and audiences, and the ethical issues they raise—and the wish to curate infrastructures of care and solidarity that will allow artists, participants and audiences to feel and to be safe.

Interestingly, while boycott as a tactic could perhaps best be described as 'a withdrawal of participation',[163] its recent popularity relate to the Occupy movement and the new political organisations and participatory formations that were formed after its rise.[164] Thus, as I start this research with participation and speech, and end with boycott and silence, I call for a nonbinary perception of

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[163] 'The art boycott is not principally associated with the withdrawal from work but, rather, the withdrawal of participation, in which participation is understood to be charged with ethical consent.' Ibid., 17.

[164] Tamir writes:

> Although boycotts withdraw from sites rather than take them over, the art boycott derives part of its political character and some of its momentum from the Occupy movement. It belongs to a political landscape that was redrawn by the Arab Spring of 2011, which ushered in new modes of political organisation across Europe and America, especially through the implementation of new techniques for political activism. The Spanish Indignados protests, also known as 15M, were the first of the new movements. They inaugurated a new mode of mass political protest based on occupations that reached decisions with consensus based procedures, and they initiated a new icon for protest by wearing the Guy Fawkes masks now associated with Anonymous. Occupy Wall Street, and the global Occupy movement that followed, was consciously modelled on this Spanish prototype, spreading its techniques and norms back across the world from whence it came. Occupy describes itself as 'consensual, non-hierarchical, and participatory self-governance,' not merely asking the state to be more democratic but 'literally laying the framework for a new world by building it here and now.'

Ibid., 21.

these two supposedly opposing ends. While boycott is mostly perceived as a complete withdrawal or refusal and deems any art making as complicity,[165] I'm personally more interested in critical forms of participation, or refusal within participation, or participatory refusal—if there is such a thing.[166] I'm interested in artists and curators in places such as Russia, Iran, Hungary, Poland, Turkey, Israel and others, despite all the differences—and there are many—who work to critically respond, react to and undermine violent and oppressive forms of

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[165] Also, 'rather than see art as an active agent within political struggle, or even acknowledge that every political struggle must also be a cultural struggle, the art boycott dovetails with the idea that art's only mode of participation is complicity.' Ibid., 21.

[166] This is closer in perception to forms of institutional critique, for example, Andrea Fraser explains:

> From the vantage point of institutional critique, I define criticism as an ethical practice of self-reflexive evaluation of the ways in which we participate in the reproduction of the relations of domination.' So, ethics allows participation in an institution by providing subjective compensation for an objective predicament. Following the example of institutional critique rather than the art boycott, Liberate Tate stages protest events within the Tate, dissensually participating in, rather than withdrawing from, the institution.

Ibid., 21.

This of course raises its own ethical concern regarding the agenda and interest of those who participate, and the case of a protest march at the Tate is different than, for example, a solo exhibition of Andrea Fraser or Santiago Sierra in an institution they wish to criticise. But then again, so does the boycott, when for some it is easier to boycott as they are powerful enough to not pay the price, and for others it isn't, or it depends on the context, geographical location and institution.

governance, whether it is within institutions and with governmental funding, or completely independently in self-made organisations or in public spheres—whether their ways are overt, sneaky, subversive and poetic, or propagandic, spectacular and loud.

Exploring the history and characteristics of what we call democracy was a tool for me to reach an understanding of how democracy or its lack manifest in participatory practices, and to differentiate between participatory and collective practices. It also allowed me to reach an understanding of why I don't seek to curate collectively. When a collective seeks for consensus, it in fact asks people to give away their differences; as such, it manifests false harmony, which could lead to a totalitarian approach. There is no consensus without hierarchy—the weaker would need to give up. However, constant dissensus which is never resolved could lead to political stagnation, which could be the downside of conflictual practices.

As I'm finalising this thesis, the political turmoil in Israel seems to demonstrate this conflict to the extreme, emphasising that an entity that has claimed to be a democracy can easily turn into fascism, where the majority violently forces the minority to accept its agenda, by attempting to change the governmental and legal system until it crumbles entirely. While chaos prevails, art seems almost hopeless, and at the same time, perhaps the only hope left for creative practitioners who do not separate life and practice. So this is what I have left, for now: I'm looking for a form of participatory curating that can enable dissensus or conflict, or allow different voices that are not necessarily harmonious, without essentialising provocation as its main desired attribute; one that doesn't seek a joint authorship or a consensus but that reflects on the very character of participation through embodiment, being with, sometimes refusing, and a constant reciprocal relation between speaking and listening.

2. Community-Based Practice and Participatory Art: From Ethical Amelioration to Conflictual Aesthetics: A Theoretical Outline

2.1 Unfinished Thoughts on (In)operative Communities

Community-based practice, social practice and participatory practices have been buzzwords in artistic discourse for at least three decades, with various subterms and genres being coined and adopted by artists, curators and theoreticians. Extensive research has been done on these practices, with Miwon Kwon, Claire Bishop, Grant Kester and Pablo Helguera among the more familiar names, albeit mostly from a Western, and more particularly US-based, perspective. More recently, Sruti Bala's research from the standpoint of the juxtaposition of the performative/participatory takes a more global embodied perspective. I engage with this perspective in various chapters in this thesis.[1]

Claire Bishop has discussed how new surges of participatory art have followed certain historical moments of political turmoil and social critique: for example, in the years leading to the rise of fascism in Italy, in the time that followed the 1917 revolution, in the social dissent that led to 1968, and in its aftermath in the 1970s.[2] Sruti Bala noted that in the 1960s and 1970s parallel processes happened in Central and South America, where participation was meant as a call for engagement with marginalised groups who have no voice in public life.

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[1] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art.*

[2] Bishop, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship.* I will write more about the reciprocal relations between art and activism in chapter 5 via Gregory Sholette.

At the same time in African and Asian contexts, artists were involved with nation building as well as with civil rights, feminist and indigenous movements.[3]

Pablo Helguera, interested in the intersection of socially engaged art and education, wrote that socially engaged art in the US is performance in the expanded field, and that it is rooted in the influences of art from the 1960s, for example Allan Kaprow and the situationists, or Suzanne Lacy and others who employed feminist art theory in education.[4] Miwon Kwon was also addressing the birth of these practices in the US during the 1990s, looking at their various manifestations, as well as problems and critiques.[5] She described the emergence of what was coined by Suzanne Lacy as 'new genre public art'—engaging public art in which the relationship between the artist and audience may itself be the artwork.[6] In relation to her case study of the 1993 Chicago

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[3] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art*, 13.

[4] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, ix–x.

[5] Kwon, *One Place After Another,* 82–155. Kwon focused on the US but emphasised that there were many other manifestations of site specific and community-based practices all over the world.

[6] Lacy writes about the convergence of the emergence of the term with the removal of Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* sculpture from Federal Plaza in New York, after a long controversial court case. The removal was considered a victory for the community oriented approach to Public Art, in which the so-called community rejected high art in favour of more artistic accountability for 'the people'. The term New Genre Public Art was officially coined for a three-day symposium organised by Lacy and others, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* at the San Francisco Museum of Modern art in November 1991. Suzanne Lacy, 'Cultural Pilgrimage and Metaphorical Journeys' in *Mapping the Terrain*, ed. Suzanne Lacy (Bay Press, 1995), 11, 19, 20.

exhibition *Culture in Action* (curated by Mary Jane Jacob), she mentioned that the works also coincide with what critic Arlene Raven has identified as 'art in the public interest'—activist art dealing directly with social issues using traditional art media as well as nontraditional forms including dance, demonstrations, guerrilla theatre, oral histories and street art. It encourages coalition building in pursuit of social justice for the disadvantaged and better representation of minorities, endorses institutional empowerment of artists so that they can act as social agents, and calls for museums and funding agencies to use their influence to change government policies on social issues.[7] Raven relates these works to the lineage of the avant-garde's efforts to integrate art and everyday life during the 1960s and 1970s. Lacy connects them with the development of activist communities of common interest during the 1970s and 1980s, or as she calls them, 'various vanguard groups, such as feminist, ethnic, Marxist, and media artists and other activists...(who) have a common interest in leftist politics, social activism, redefined audience, relevance for communities (particularly marginalised ones), and collaborative methodology.'[8] Such interests according to Lacy lead to the challenging of aesthetic norms, an attack on the boundaries of specific media or the spaces of presentation, and a questioning of cultural values and aesthetics of individual artistic authorship. Art's focus thus shifts from artist to audience, from object to process, from production to reception, and to engagement and shared authorship. According to Kwon, who was interested in the changes in the character of site-specific art,

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[7] Arlene Raven, *Art in the Public Interest*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 1, 4, 18.

[8] Lacy, 'Cultural Pilgrimage and Metaphorical Journeys', 25.

instead of focusing on the physical conditions of the site, the focus of art in the 1990s was on the social issues of the people who inhabited it.[9]

These descriptions might have equally been made of artistic tendencies of the last decade, relating to protest movements that arose in response to the US mortgage crisis and the European financial crisis of 2007–8. Interestingly, when Kwon discusses the various ways the term 'community' was used in the 1990s for political gain, and how the art tendencies she described emerged in response, she mentions how neoconservatives define a 'real' community as based solely on ownership of property. They called on these so-called communities to protect their needs and defend their territories, thus attacking leftist social policy.[10] Currently, these kinds of arguments are being used more and more all over the world, mostly by right-wing governments. They are cultivated to justify inclusive, ultracapitalist, antiecologist and antidemocratic laws, as if those are being set against 'foreign' threats to the wholeness and interests of a certain 'community'. While the term community is being coopted for neoliberal purposes, so, often, are community-based and participatory art practices. I will return to the problematic relationship between neoliberalism and participatory practices throughout the thesis.

2.1.1 The Inoperative Community: Between the Imaginary and the Political

Theorising communities has often been an essential part of defining social or participatory practices. In the *OnCurating* issue discussing ontological and

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[9] Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 106–111.

[10] Ibid., 112–114.

political notions of community, the editors mentioned Rancière's perspective in *The Distribution of the Sensible*,[11] where visibility or audibility enable or prevent one's access to a certain community, thus inherently connecting aesthetics and politics through the question of communality.[12] In this regard, culture produces communities and the hierarchies that come with them. Grant Kester has examined the use of the term 'community' in community-based practices, while differentiating between projects that create new communities and those that work with existing communities.[13] He discusses Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* as part of his research into what he calls 'dialogic art', a term which I'll explain shortly. Kester writes how the concept of a community has been compromised through totalitarianism, particularly during the Nazi regime. Defining identity via the negation of another population and regarding that 'other' as threatening the wholeness of a homogenic community, totalitarianism turned the term community into a contested one. At the same time, collective forms of identity have been challenged by poststructuralist thinkers such as Jean Francois Lyotard and Gilles Deleuze. Nancy, however,

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[11] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics Of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible,* (NY: Continuum Intl Pub Group, 2004).

[12] Elke Bippus, Joerg Huber, Dorothee Richter eds., *OnCurating* no.7, 'Being-with Community Ontological and Political Perspectives'**,** Institute for Critical Theory, Zurich University of the Arts, https://www.on-curating.org/issue-7.html#.Yff38sYxnkI Accessed 2 April, 2023.

[13] Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces, Community and Conversation in Modern Art*), 152–181.

attempts to redefine community as a fragmented way of existing in common.[14] According to him, the constant forming and re-forming of our identities as they encounter others causes anxiety, which in turn triggers the creation of essentialist communities, or the fascist collective. In a nonfascist community we acknowledge our lack of substantial identity; thus we do not negate others, as we understand our own mortality and theirs.

Lars Gertenbach and Dorothee Richter[15] point to the difficulties in attempting to turn Nancy's philosophical-ontological concept of an inoperative community, a community which cannot be realised, into political practice. While all communities are imaginarily constituted, based on an idea of unity, the embodied practice of this imaginary involves a closure towards the outside and an attempt to achieve harmony within. This could take the form of a sense of safety, belonging, and identification, but also of extreme violent mechanisms of exclusion, or violent excesses.[16] The identification with the community is in fact the identification with the imagined other, they discern, following Freud and Lacan. Freud discussed the obliteration of the self in favour of a communal 'we' and a 'libidinous constitution of the mass.'[17] Following Lacan, the perspective of identity in unity could only exist in the imaginary mode, concealing the difference within a community and creating an irrevocable rift between "reality" and the imaginary. This produces alienation and at the same time a desire for

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[14] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. and trans. Peter Connor *et al* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), xli, xl.

[15] Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community'.

[16] Ibid., 2–4.

[17] Sigmund Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (New York: Norton, 1989).

its denial in order to achieve the impossible fictional unity.[18] The constant desire for identification and the unattainable merging with the other could lead to excesses of community in the form of exclusion and violence, as well as to moments of joy and ecstasy.[19] Žižek notes that communities often perceive themselves as being externally threatened despite the lack of a concrete threat, because of phantasmatic projections of the communal imaginary. He relates this to Lacan's notion of *jouissance*,[20] a kind of egocentric painful pleasure inherent to concepts of community, which explains both mechanisms of support and solidarity as well as self-sacrifice and subjugation typical of nationalist perceptions.[21]

Going back to Nancy, Richter and Gertenback define the problematics of developing a political practice based on his theory as relating to Nancy's foregrounding of the unifying over the antagonistic.[22] In other words, through his term 'being-with' Nancy defines plurality, or the being together in a

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[18] Jacques Lacan, 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the I Function, as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience', in *Écrits: A Selection,* trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2002), 3–9, quoted in Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community',4–5.

[19] Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community', 4–6.

[20] Enjoyment in French; I will return to this term later on.

[21] Slavoj Žižek, 'Enjoy Your Nation as Yourself!', in *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader,* , Back, Les and John Solomos, eds., (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 594–606.

[22] Oliver Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

community, as a prerequisite of existence which precedes any singularity.[23] In addition, Richter and Gertenback claim that Nancy shifts the excessive towards the ecstatic, based on the Greek word *e'kstasis* (to step out of oneself), rather than perceiving it as related to notions of identity such as with Žižek's interpretation.[24] At the same time, while Nancy points to the impossibility of constituting a community on a political level, he does call for diversity and justice within the 'being- with', or in other words for a radical interpretation of the idea of community as neither identity-based nor homogenising.

To bridge the gap between the ontological and the political, Richter and Gertenback suggest Althusser's interpellation,[25] the moment in which subjects are being constructed by being addressed. They juxtapose this with Lacan's mirror stage, in which the subject emerges as only imaginarily complete. While subjectivations take place in the symbolic realm—there the subject is being subjugated to the social conditions to which he or she are born into—the subject is still unified in fantasy in the pictorial-imaginary, and thus is always

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[23] Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community', 7, referring to Jean-Luc Nancy, *La communauté affrontée* (Paris: Galilée, 2001) and to Jean-Luc Nancy, *Die herausgeforderte Gemeinschaft.* Translation of La communauté affrontée into German by Esther von der Osten (Berlin: Diaphanes, 2007).

[24] Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community', 8, referring to Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community.*

[25] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays,* trans. Ben Brewster. London: New Left Books,1971.

divided.[26] However, Althusser's interpellation implies that the subject could 'fight back', or, as Richter and Gertenback put it: 'Ideological apparatuses of state play a role in the creation and consolidation of systems of government, but the ideological sphere can also be used against existing systems of government.'[27]

The relationship between the imaginary and the pictorial as projection-based deceptive perceptions of the individual are particularly interesting for me, as I will attempt later to differentiate the visual realm from the audial one, or the realm of the gaze from the one of the voice, following Freud, Lacan, Dollar, and Žižek, among others. In this regard, Richter and Gertenback engaged with Merz's writings on cinema's ability to create a fictional narrative and its relation to Lacan's imaginary, connecting it to the idea that community building for Nancy is situated within the pictorial-imaginary mode rather than in institutions and their symbolic systems.

As an alternative the writers offer the example of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe's 'antagonisms' a term which I will revisit from various perspectives throughout the thesis. Rather than pointing out the gap between theory and politics as impossible to bridge, Laclau and Mouffe are concerned with articulating political demands through a performative constitution of equality. At

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[26] Jacques Lacan, 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious', in *Ecrits: A Selection,* trans. A. Sheridan (London: Tavistock Publications, (1960) 1980).

[27] Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community', 9.

the same time they recognise the gap as a 'constitutive element of a possible emancipatory politics.'[28]

The emphasis on a reflexive perception of antagonistic (or, as they are sometimes called, conflictual) participatory practices is central to my curatorial practice. I will return to examining the notion of antagonisms from a curatorial perspective in the upcoming chapters, and how it builds upon theories of participatory and political art practices. Reflexivity itself is a central trope in many of the theoretical writings on social practice and participatory practices. For example, Helguera, in his definition of socially engaged art, mentioned that it can be distinguished as 'a subset of artworks that feature the experience of their own creation as a central element.'[29]

Reflexivity will be one of my main tools in writing this thesis, as a way of enabling the appearance of the complexities and blind spots of the featured projects. I will attempt to create a survey of participatory, political and performative curatorial practice, both mine and others', while taking a closer look at the gap between the imaginary and the political, questioning whether it indeed could manifest emancipatory politics, rather than merely pointing to its own failures. I will search for a third option—neither a naive emancipatory victory nor a tragic mirroring of failures—and will attempt to sketch what this option might be, both in the curatorial and in the artistic perspective.

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[28] Gertenbach and Richter, 'The Imaginary and the Community', 10–13, quoting 'Hegemony and Socialism: An Interview with Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau', *Palinurus: Engaging Political Philosophy*, (1998) http://anselmocarranco.tripod.com/id68.html Accessed on 22 November 2013.

[29] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art, A Materials and Techniques Handbook,* 1.

2.1.2 Dialogic Art as Operating With (In)operative Communities

Grant Kester did try to turn Nancy's notion into an operative political practice, in a different manner than Mouffe and Laclau's antagonistic model, which he in fact criticised, as I'll soon specify. He defined dialogical or conversation-based practices via Nancy's term of 'being-outside-self', in which the participants in the projects think and act outside of their usual identity positions:[30]

Nancy writes of the 'being of communication' as opposed to the act of 'subject representing', marking the distinction between a dialogical encounter in which subjectivity itself is transformed and a communicative interaction staged by fixed subjects enunciating or 'representing' preexisting judgments.[31]

Kester defines dialogic art as revolving around the facilitation of a dialogue among diverse communities:

> Parting from the traditions of object making, these artists have adopted a performative, process-based approach. They are 'context providers'…whose work involves the creative orchestration of collaborative encounters and conversations, well beyond the institutional confines of the gallery or museum.[32]

He describes dialogic practices as facilitating concrete interventions in which traditional art materials are replaced by 'sociopolitical relationships'. These artists are not interested in the formal conditions of the object, but in the ways in which aesthetic experience can challenge conventional perceptions and

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[30] Ibid., 24.

[31] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 155–156.

[32] Ibid.,1. Kester gives as examples Wochenklausur Collective, Suzanne Lacy, and others.

systems of knowledge, without being shocking or difficult to understand. They creatively facilitate dialogue and exchange and put conversation at their core, treated as a process or a performance. Their emphasis is on the interaction, not the resulting product, thus the reciprocal relations with the participants or viewers are part of the constitution of the work. Kester is interested in works that revolve around the negotiation of difference, creating an open space where individuals can break free from preexisting roles and obligations, reacting and interacting in new ways. Thus, they take control over their own image and transcend clichés.[33]

Kester's definition of dialogic art has proximity with Pablo Helguera's definition of the more general term 'social practice', or 'socially engaged art' (SEA), as being multi-disciplinary, dependent on social intercourse as a main factor of its existence, involving others besides the artist, and being critically detached from other forms of art which are centred around the personality of the artist or the manufacturing of an object.[34] Helguera defines SEA as a community-building mechanism, while the spectrum of the said mechanism shifts between promoting 'feel-good' positive social values to exploiting individuals for the purpose of criticising exploitation. Helguera claims that practices which are on

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[33] Ibid., 3–10.

[34] Helguera differentiates between symbolic and actual social practice, the first being a mere conceptual representation of ideas, the second having an emancipatory force and aiming for a lasting effect on the spheres of politics and culture. Based on Habermas's 1981 The Theory of Communicative Action, he associates the actual practice, which he favours, with a communicative action geared to encourage understanding between individuals. Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*, 1–8.

the opposing ends of this spectrum, promoting either total harmony or total confrontation, usually do not involve the critical self-reflexive dialogue with a community which is the key factor for a meaningful SEA project. In order to establish which projects do generate the desired reflexivity, Helguera defines different levels of participation: nominal participation, in which the viewer contemplates the work; directed participation, in which the viewer completes simple tasks as directed; creative participation, in which the viewer provides content within a structure provided by an artist; and collaborative participation, in which the viewer shares responsibility in developing both structure and content. In addition, he differentiates the participants' predisposition towards participation: whether they engage in a voluntary way, actively and willingly; in a nonvoluntary way, meaning they are obliged to engage, for example through a school project; and involuntary, meaning they are unaware of the full intentions of the project.[35]

Helguera relates the involuntary form of participation to the antagonistic realm, not for the purpose of creating alienation but in order to raise debate and provoke reflection. He claims that these kinds of participatory engagements are the most subtle and difficult to negotiate as they involve deceit or seduction, but they also might turn into the most meaningful SEA projects.[36] In this respect, his approach could provide a sort of bridge between Kester and Bishop in their rendition of antagonism and conflictual participation, as I will soon explain. From a curatorial position, involuntary participation poses particular

[35] For example upon accidently tackling an art project in the public sphere, such as in the case of Christoph Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria* (2001), a project which I will expand on later.

[36] Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art* , 59–64.

challenges, as the curator is torn between the wish to articulate a project to the wider public, an inherent part of her or his job, and the wish to maintain the ambiguity shaped by the artist and the element of surprise and discovery that comes with a gradual understanding of the work. In addition, the question of ethics arises more acutely from a curatorial perspective, as a curator, considered the authority that explains and mediates the obscured artistic practices to the audience, is not allowed the same ethical freedom as the artist. I will delve deeper into these topics in the upcoming chapters, by looking at my own curatorial projects as well as through conversations with fellow curators and artists, particularly in the interview with Florian Malzacher and Jonas Staal.

Back to Kester and Nancy, Kester problematises Nancy's definition of an ethical community, in its reliance upon specular rather than discursive notions. This is an important point for Kester as he attempts to define a community based on dialogue and communication. Nancy, according to Kester, saw all forms of dialogue as being only able to reinforce essentialist identity. For him, intersubjective relations develop only from a specular recognition of one's death as it interrupts the myth of an essentialist community. Kester mentioned that 'specular' could easily become 'spectacular'—the kind of aesthetics based on the concept of a violent interruption through shock, in line with the avant-garde tradition of the artist bringing an epiphany. Dialogic practices, Kester claims, stand in contrast to the two contradictory perceptions of the avant-garde: the first that while the capacity to understand art is universal, the 'masses' will never fully understand it; the second that art should be abstract and inaccessible, in order to create an impactful or transformative moment.[37]

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[37] Ibid., 32–36.

[37] Ibid. ,9.

He suggests that while dialogic practices relate to the avant-garde perception of art as eliciting openness to difference, they do not have to be shocking or difficult to understand in order to achieve this.[38] The artists that he looks at 'ask if there is a possibility to reclaim a less violent and more convivial relationship with the viewer while preserving the critical insight that esthetic experience can offer to objectifying forms of knowledge.'[39] I will return to this point later via the distinctions between Bishop and Kester regarding the aesthetics of shock and provocation in participatory practices.

Kester claims that dialogical encounters are nuanced and involve a partial suspension of identity, and that communities don't have to be either completely fascist and static or, on the contrary, mutable and in flux. He points to Miwon Kwon's critique of essentialist community formations in community-based art: Kwon writes that projects that work with existing communities run the risk of reaffirming the perception of unity for that community, and becoming a mere description of an existing social unit; alternatively, she calls for projects that create a provisional community that conveys the impossibility of wholeness and consolidation. Kwon's critique is in line with Nancy's perception of a community: existing collective entities affirm the viewer's sense of self, thus community-based practice should create a community by pointing to its impossibility. The artist can activate this reflexive position by raising questions and making the

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[38] Ibid., 27

[39] Miwon Kwon, 'Public Art and Urban Identities', in *Public Art Strategies: Public Art and Public Space, 1998 American Photography Institute National Graduate Seminar Proceedings*, ed. Cheryl Younger (New York: New York University/ Tisch School or the Arts, 1998) 168.

[39] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 162.

viewers uncomfortable about who they are.[40] Kwon's position in this regard relates to Bishop's perception of the desired type of participatory art, as we will see further on.

Kester however claims that not all politically coherent communities are vulnerable to appropriation, because when a community predefines itself, this is different to the discursive violence involved in being defined by someone else: 'it is the difference between naming and being named, and the profoundly different forms of political agency that each of these actions represent.'[41] The danger in Kwon's critique of what she calls 'the community of mythical unity,' according to Kester, is the implied message that preexisting communities don't know any better than to embrace unified identities, and only the privileged artist can show them otherwise—again, in line with the avant-garde perception of art as providing revelations to the ignorant people. Kester suggests that the coherence of a preexisting or preorganised community is not intrinsically evil, that 'it is possible to define oneself through solidarity with others while at the same (time)…attending to the complex differences within the continuum of relative coherence'.[42] Thus he calls for the achievement of a critical community

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[40] Ibid.,163.

[41] In relation to that, Kester points to the advantages of artists who work with communities for an extended time, rather than being involved in short term commissions in contexts that they don't fully understand.

[41] Ibid., 172–174.

consciousness through collaborative exchanges rather than an avant-gardist spectacle.[43]

Kester mentions that the perception of a self-reflexive criticality as being the only possible mode is often hard to reconcile with the political coherence necessary for engaging in collective forms of political resistance that aspire to achieve concrete changes.[44] This point has become extremely relevant again in the recent decade as participatory practices have become more engaged with protest movements. On the one hand, the urgency and immediacy of activist protests, looking for clear symbols for widely spreading their messages, don't always coincide with the subtlety and sophistication expected from contemporary art practices. Thus, there is a call for more direct political symbolism in artistic political practices from various theorists, artists and activists.[45] On the other hand, clear, strong symbols become easy prey for demagogic claims regarding the supposedly provocative nature of political art; governing bodies aiming to limit critical thought in order to maintain their hegemony could claim that these clear symbols are allegedly hurtful to certain communities; this method is often being used for silencing minority groups or for censoring critical voices that deviate from the mainstream.[46]At the same

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[43] Oliver Marchart addresses this question and offers as a solution 'conflictual aesthetics', as I will shortly explain. Another example is artist Jonas Staal, whom I write about in the upcoming chapters, who often uses aesthetics reminiscent of political propaganda in his work.

[45] As I've explained in the introduction, in Israel censorship of art due to presumed hurtful content became common in recent years, and works have been covered,

[46] As I've explained in the introduction, in Israel censorship of art due to presumed hurtful content became common in recent years, and works have been covered,

time, governing entities as well as dissident groups from all sides of the political map are using propagandistic creative tactics to spread their own agenda, claiming the right of freedom of speech, at times making it difficult to discern when free expression becomes hate speech. Within these complexities, I would claim that maintaining a self-reflexive criticality, that always questions its own authority through continual conflictual conversations, is more relevant than ever in fighting both the authoritarian approach of demagogic politics and the overwhelming and at times numbing effect of identity politics. I will elaborate more on these questions later and exemplify my position through several case studies.

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taken out of an exhibition or caused entire exhibitions to close. The examples are complex because at times minority groups have indeed claimed to have been hurt, but often it has been 'informers' from extreme right-wing organisations who have informed representatives of these communities and of the government about the supposedly hurtful piece, inciting outrage and violence. Some examples are 'McJesus' in Haifa Museum, David Rib's 'Jerusalem of Shit' in Ramat Gan Museum and many others. More info can be found here:

https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/mcdonald-jesus-art-mcjesus-israel-museum-protests-haifa-a8725936.html

and here: https://www.art-insider.com/ramat-gan-museum-in-tel-aviv-closes-after-censorship-controversy/3408

Another form of prevailing censorship in Israel is administered on works that question the militaristic perspectives in society, relate to history from a Palestinian perspective or even simply propose empathy, as I explained in length in my introduction.

2.2 The Participatory Condition: Theoretical Perspectives on Capitalism, Democracy and Participation

In the book *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*,[47] the editors define the current era through the extent to which all our activities, whether social, political, economic or cultural, are organised around prioritising participation.[48] Although the relationship between participation and digital media are not my focus, I believe that this perspective is important to understanding how participation shifted and extended through its online presence, and how this contributes to its further cooptation by neoliberalism. Online participation was considered in the 1990s to manifest the promises of direct democracy for all, and extensive citizen participation.[49] However, it increasingly became the

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[47] Barney at al, *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*.

[47] Ibid., vii.

The editors discuss Henry Jenkins, who coined the term 'participatory culture' (1992), describing the culture of fan communities in the 1990s and their 'spreadability' due to the emergence of the internet, and expand its scope to include additional additional realms to the cultural:

Henry Jenkins, *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, *Spreadable Media: Creating Value and Meaning in a Networked Culture* (New York: New York University, 2011).

[48] This promise resurfaced later at certain historical moments, for example during the widespread protest of 2011–2012 as I will further explain in chapter 5.

[49] Barney et al, *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, x.

[49] Bala, The Gestures of Participation, 1–2.

starkest example of manipulated and controlled labour and of the degradation of individual political agency by powerful governments, and even more so, by private corporations. Thus, participation is more than ever a contradictory term, always coveted as a utopian fantasy and in parallel criticised as dangerous: 'Contemporary participation has become a *pharmakon* of sorts, to borrow one of the key concepts from Bernard Stiegler's philosophy of technology: both a poison and a remedy, a benefit and a problem, a promise of emancipation as well as a form of subjection.'[50] As Sruti Bala described it, participation is 'at once a source of artistic, social and political hope, and simultaneously the vulgar distortion of this hope into a form of profit-oriented governance and subjugation.'[51]

In *Undoing the Demos*, Wendy Brown[52] described neoliberal logic in terms of the expectation that one must constantly enhance one's self-value; on the one hand through shaping one's 'portfolio' to attract investors, for example in social networks, and on the other through top-down governing techniques using teamwork and networking. Thus, participation and collaboration could easily turn into another form of individual self-enhancement on the way to strengthening one's competitive positioning for future self-value. In neoliberal logic, everything is a market, and we are all market actors, in competition rather than in exchange with each other, to increase our ranking. Solidarity, commoning or collective citizenship become hard to find. When we are measured as human capital, inequality becomes the norm as the world divides into winners and losers. The state as well pursues justice and human rights

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[50] Brown, *Undoing the Demos: Neoliberalism's Stealth Revolution,* 30–3.

only if those turn into profit and debt reduction (as in the case of the mortgage crisis in the US and the German treatment of southern European debt). During the Covid-19 pandemic, on which I will write more later, governments were not worried about the implications of quarantine on human rights such as freedom of movement or on mental health, but on the condition of the market and the economy. The principles of democracy such as freedom, sovereignty and equality are transformed in neoliberal logic from the field of politics to the field of economy, and then hollowed out, writes Brown following Foucault, thus changing *homo-politicus* into *homo-eoconomicus*. In this manner neoliberalism limits the life of its citizens to mere concern with survival and wealth acquisition, writes Brown, as well as naturalising social inequalities.[53] According to Chantal Mouffe, the dissolving of boundaries between intellectual activity, political action and labour resulted in the absorbing of the characteristics of political action into post-fordist labour. Neoliberal hegemony is the result of a discursive construction: 'through a process of sedimentation, the political origin of those contingent practices has been erased; they have become naturalized, and the forms of identification that they have produced have crystallized in identities which are taken for granted.' [54]

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[53] Ibid., 87–111. Brown also emphasised the gendered aspect of the homo-eoconomicus where the individual homo-eoconomicus is always male, and women are naturalised as invisible caregivers that hold the neoliberal infrastructure together. The privatisation of dismantling of public social support infrastructures for families, children or the elderly intensifies this gender subordination. Thus, while inequality between men and women is attributed to sexual difference, it is an effect of neoliberalism rather than a cause.

[54] Mouffe, *Agonistics, Thinking the World Politically*, 87–89.

In *The Digital Condition*, Felix Stalder described a cultural transformation that has accelerated since the 1960s, in which more and more people participate in cultural processes, via complex technologies, creating conflicted political dynamics. Stalder differentiates between two trajectories that characterise the digital condition: postdemocracy and the commons.[55] He defines postdemocracy as a situation in which many people participate in social activities and supposedly have a voice, but they are not part of actual decision-making processes. The important political and cultural decisions are in the hands of an authoritarian elite, such as in the case of social networks run by operations like Google or Facebook. Commons on the other hand, according to Stalder, represent the development of institutions that 'not only directly combine participation and decision-making but also integrate economic, social, and ethical spheres—spheres that Modernity has tended to keep apart.'[56] These institutions, such as Wikipedia and open code programmes, represent a renewal or a radical expansion of democracy, and real participation and agency. They expand, according to Stalder, possibilities of collective decision-making, and return technological sovereignty to the citizens. One should mention however that these institutions of commoning are not free from the dangers of authoritarian control under surveillance capitalism, as Stadler himself admits.[57]

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[55] Stalder, *The Digital Condition*, 5–8, 19–25. I will look closely at the multiple meanings of commons in chapter 6.

[56] Ibid., 25.

[57] Ibid., 8, and see for example here regarding CIA involvement in Wikipedia edits: https://www.wired.com/2007/08/wiki-tracker/

Participation has always been linked to taking part in decision making or being directly involved with the organisation of social and political systems. In this light participation is a kind of interpellation, in relation to Luis Althusser's concept of the constitution of the subject by a pregiven structure—[58] a process in which we become the subjects we are, by responding to the hail of ideological formations that structure our social environment. In other words, we become ideological subjects by being named members of a certain group. Althusser describes the primary scene of interpellation as the hailing and hearing of a lawful exclamation: a police officer calls 'Hey, you there!' When a person turns around to that call, he willingly becomes that subject, framed by the laws and rules of society, even if he wasn't specifically the one called. In a participatory society we are all hailed as participants and so respond to the call and participate. As participation is tied to the bedrock of democracy—we are 'allowed' to participate because we live in a so-called democracy—allowing all citizens to participate is the democratic thing to do. Not participating is considered suspicious, unsocial, perhaps even subversively unpatriotic. Everything becomes a tool to increase engagement in order to control and make profit. Participation as interpellation became a dominant tool in the West for inscribing individuals into the social order.[59] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe wrote about the relationship between interpellation, participation and social struggles:

> Interpellated as equals in their capacity as consumers, ever more numerous groups are impelled to reject the real inequalities which continue

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[58] Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)', 174.

[59] Barney *et al*, *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age,*: ix, x.

to exist. This democratic consumer culture has undoubtedly stimulated the emergence of new struggles which have played an important part in the rejection of old forms of subordination.[60]

Returning to *The Participatory Condition*, its authors claim that the long history of identifying participation with politics in the Western tradition is what prepares us for accepting the hail of participation. However, while both historical and modern citizenship are defined around belonging to a community, not everyone who belongs participates actively, and not everyone who is active can actually belong.[61] In the history of liberal democracy, the participation of some rests on the structural exclusion of others from participating in political institutions or in the public sphere. As early as in Aristotle's descriptions of citizenship in Greek society, women and slaves 'belonged' to the household and were excluded from 'the administration of justice and holding of office',[62] a labour which was at the heart of the Aristotelian definition of a citizen. Many of the struggles over political agency in history can be attributed, according to Rancière, to what he calls 'the part that has no part', attempting to rearrange the power relations between the different parts of society.[63]

While contemporary participation is the very premise of democracy, through its various institutions, democracy is still criticised as not being participatory

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[60] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 164.

[61] Barney et al., *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, xii.

[62] Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle,* ed. and trans. Ernest Barker, *(*Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962), 93.

[63] Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.

enough by excluding some and including others. Various theoreticians describe democratic participation as occurring outside the formal institution, in the informal encounters of the democratic public sphere, which I will also address later via Oliver Marchart and Rosalind Krauss; for example, in participating in public life and appearing in front of each other as equal and committing to action in speech, in Hannah Arendt's account of the Athenian Polis;[64] or through rational critical debate between individuals in the public sphere according to Jürgen Habermas.[65] In regard to these theories, two tendencies are mentioned as central to the debate on participation: the importance of relational speech acts, and mass mediation as either enabling or damaging the political potential of participation.[66] I will return to the notions of speech acts and interpellation in the chapter discussing performativity, and look at their significance for curatorial practice.

2.2.1 The Avant-Garde and Participation

Rancière defined the aesthetic regime that began in the eighteenth century, and is considered the bedrock of modern democracy, as a regulated system of visibility and invisibility in art, as well as a formal mode of interpretative

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[64] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[65] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1991).

[66] Barney et al., *The Participatory Condition in the Digital Age*, xiii.

discourse, which is based on the principle of equality.[67] Peter Bürger described the development of art from the Middle Ages to the avant-garde as a shift from collaborative to individual practice, and subsequent attempt to fuse art with life, in a manner which prepares the ground for todays' collaborative and participatory practices. Bürger sketched a historical typology that relates to the function of art, its production and its reception. In the Middle Ages, art functioned as a sacral object and was produced and received (experienced) collectively; Courtly Art functioned as a representational object, produced individually and received collectively; and Bourgeois Art was individually produced and received, while it was used to portray a self-understanding of art. Thus, it was autonomous art, no longer tied to the praxis of life like the art forms before it. In bourgeois society, according to Bürger, art was separated from life because the artists considered the competitive society bad for its citizens, and believed that art could be a joyful, humanising experience, encouraging solidarity rather than competition. The European avant-garde attempted to undermine the status of art in bourgeois society, by reintegrating art and life in a manner that negates the categories of individual creation and reception altogether, as well as the separation between producer and recipient.[68] In that sense, their practice prepared the ground for many movements which were interested in connecting art with life, closing the distance or shifting the roles between artist and audience. The promise of equality brought about by the idea

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[67] Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents,* trans. Steven Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009).

[67] Bürger, *Theorie Der Avantgarde,* 47–54.

[68] Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, xvi.

of participation[69] was shared not only by the historical avant-gardes (Dada, constructivism, and surrealism), but also by postwar happenings, relational aesthetics, and various forms of community-based art. Both avant-garde and neoavant-garde movements wished to get away from the object-based or materialistic form of art, towards an ephemeral experience that connects artists and viewers on an equal ground. In this respect, democracy is inherent to the concept of participation in art in the sense that everybody is expected to be able to participate in a cultural life of a community in a democratic country.

These movements were also impacted by forms of theatre, and particularly epic theatre, by Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, and the notion of defamiliarisation in order to arouse critical spectatorship. Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Opressed intended to interpolate the 'spectator' and turn him/her into a

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[69] In addition to the theatrical form there was a book under the same title- Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, translated from Spanish by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer, (London: Pluto Press, 2020 [1974]).

'spect-actor', through active participation and critical discussion;[70]Brecht wished to change the attitude of the audience as part of an attempt to change the larger relation of art and society.[71] Many forms and formats of political and participatory theatre that followed in the second half of the twentieth century were looking for a language and aesthetics that could reflect on the nation formation that marked the end of colonial rule, and to create a bridge between modernity and lost traditions.[72] Contemporary participatory performance and community-based art can be traced back, according to Sruti Bala, to what Eugene van Erven calls the 'counter-cultural, radical, anti-and-post-colonial, educational and liberational theatres of the 1960s and 1970s'[73] in the Global South as well as in Europe and North America, despite their different local circumstances and characters.[74]

Claire Bishop often stresses the relationship between conflictual participatory practices and a critique of the neoliberal cooptation of participatory art, as I will soon explain at length. She connects recent manifestations of participatory art to the fall of communism in 1989, to the lack of a significant alternative on the left, to the rise of the postpolitical consensus, and the almost total subjugation

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[70] In addition to the theatrical form there was a book under the same title- Augusto Boal, Theatre of the Oppressed, translated from Spanish by Charles A. and Maria-Odilia Leal McBride and Emily Fryer, (London: Pluto Press, 2020 [1974]).

[71] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art*, 10.

[72] Ibid.

[73] Eugene Van Erven, *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2001).

[74] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art*, 10.

of art to market forces.[75] This produces the paradox in the contemporary Western world, in which participation, which often attempts to criticize consumer culture, is tied to the populist agenda of neoliberal governments, for example through abusing affective labour.[76] Thus, instead of enabling the participants to have a claim or ownership, participation becomes another governing force and self-regulation tool for the ruling regime.[77]

2.3 Relational Antagonisms versus Relational Aesthetics and Dialogic Art

2.3.1 Relational Aesthetics

'Relational aesthetics' was an early attempt to define participatory art as a field of its own during the 1990s. Relational aesthetics views specific participatory or social practices as a set of relations between artwork, artist and audience,[78]

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[75] It is important to emphasise that my aim here is not to trace cause and effect between political events and shifts in the field of participatory art and curation, but to contextualise conflictual participatory curating within a discourse on participatory conflictual art, both often relating directly to sociopolitical processes. Within this discourse, I rely on theoreticians such as Bishop and Marchart and their framing of political art as part of significant protest movements and in relation to them. At the same time, I will allow myself to construct my own understanding of conflictual participatory art, reframing the meeting points and disagreements of the main theories in the field.

[76] Bishop, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, 275.

[77] Bala, *The Gestures of Participatory Art*, 52–53.

[77] Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, xvi.

[78] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics.*

wishing to extend the limits of art beyond the material art object and into a relational realm.[79] The human relations created by the production and reception of an artwork were at the heart of this concept, inviting the viewer into dialogue with the work and the space.[80] As such, its legacy can be found with art movements of the 1960s and 1970s like Fluxus, conceptual art, the situationists and institutional critique, that have criticised the commodification of art and attempted to undermine the perception of the genius artist by exploring the relations between the artwork and the spectators and the politics of exhibition making. Another connection to the 1960s and 1970s is the shift in the role of the curator—on one hand, artists took over curatorial roles such as writing or organising exhibitions, but on the other, curators have taken a more authoritative role, marking the rise of the independent curator.[81] A hint as to this relation could be found in this quote of Nicolas Bourriaud, who defined and coined relational aesthetics, marking himself as continuing the legacy of Herald Szeemann: 'We know that attitudes become forms, and we should now realise that forms prompt models of sociability.' Interestingly, both Szeeman and Bourriaud were criticised by some of the artists they worked with, for their

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[79] Miller, 'Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond'.

[80] Ibid., 167.

[81] Alkistis Kontopoulou, *Curation of Autonomy*, 26-27. Kontopoulou was one of the examiners in my upgrade, and I thank her for her poignant and generous comments and suggestions which have been very helpful for the development of my research.

dominant role in reshaping the meaning of their artistic practice and how it is understood by the public.[82]

Bourriaud developed the term relational aesthetics as a response to a set of artistic practices that he identified as prevailing at the time and in dialogue with the artists. He related these artistic practices to the legacy of the early avant-garde and its antimaterial happenings or situations, as well as to a Marxist-styled critique, placing the social interaction and not the aesthetics at the centre, and releasing art from its subjection to privatised economic agendas.[83] However, even though relational aesthetics often had participatory and performative characteristics, emphasised dialogue and process rather than object and result, and its common setting was an event or action, it differed from the tradition of the avant-garde in several ways. If the avant-garde attempted to integrate life and art in a manner which completely changes the categories of producer and recipient, artists and audiences, as I specified

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[82] Bourriaud, Relational Aesthetics, 21. Quoted by Kontopoulou, *Curation of Autonomy*, 43.

Harald Szeemann discusses the rise of the independent curator, as well as its problematics, as I have explained in the introduction to this thesis. He identified and theorised prevailing art pratices of his time, such as conceptual art, post-minimalist sculpture and arte povera, in his well-known exhibition *Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form*, 1969, Kunstahlle Bern.

As I noted in my introduction, Dorothee Richter describes in depth the contested relations between Szeemann and the artists he worked with, as well as the problematic gender-related aspects of his curatorial self-positioning. Richter, 'Artists and Curators as Authors—Competitors, Collaborators, or Teamworkers*?*', 43–57.

[83] Ibid, 168.

above, relational aesthetics was often criticised for staying within the art world's boundaries and catering to an elitist art world milieu. These projects were happening within the confines of art institutions rather than in the public sphere and ended up as exhibitable artworks.[84] Moreover, they seemed to have lacked reflexivity regarding the exclusive nature of the art world, or criticality regarding its unequal ground for potential participants. As Claire Bishop claimed, the quality of these relations was not called into question or evaluated: 'If relational art produces human relations…then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?'[85] Similarly, Hal Foster claimed that if everything is 'happy interactivity', there is no aesthetic basis on which to evaluate the work of art.[86]

A couple of decades later, Sollfrank et al pointed to a contradiction in Bourriaud's own words in regards to relational aesthetics' critical and supposedly radical aims:

> Contradicting himself, Bourriaud made sure that the works he selected would have no ambition whatsoever 'to overcome the system of organized exploitation and domination' that is responsible for the social misery and alienation typical of our societies, although he had claimed that the works in question were 'responses' to such circumstances. In fact, relational art was about 'learning to inhabit the world in a better way, instead of trying to construct it based on a preconceived idea.'[87]

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[84] Sollfrank et al, *Aesthetics of the Commons*, 28.

[85] Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics'.

[86] Hal Foster, 'Arty Party'.

[87] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, 13.

Jason Miller, in an article written more than a decade after Bourriaud's account and Bishop's criticism, also attempted to complicate the well-known debate. Miller's main critique of relational aesthetics was that identifying the work solely with the relations it produces problematises the understanding of the art object itself (for example, the pile of candies in Felix Gonzales Torres' untitled series); its status as an art object with aesthetic characteristics is unclear, and as a result its definition as art becomes uncertain.[88] By that logic, he claims that if the degree of participation is the way to evaluate the aesthetics of the work, then the question should be what kind of participation. With that, he agrees with Bishop regarding the lack of a critical perception in the relations described by Bourriaud. For example, if Rirkrit Tiravanija, one of the artists affiliated with relational aesthetics, only welcomes a privileged artworld crowd to his cooking events,[89] this has a significance for the quality of the work.

Miller then turned his critique towards Bishop's concept of relational or aesthetic antagonism, which champions the aesthetic value of provocative or disruptive art:

> Granting Bishop's concern that socially engaged art 'has become largely exempt from art criticism', we can likewise insist that antagonistic art not

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[88] Miller, 'Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond', 165–183, 169.

[89] Liam Gillick protested this claim and suggested that the work welcomed everybody, and that critics did not visit the exhibition in order to experience it themselves.

Gillick, Letters and Responses, *October*, 95–107.

exempt itself from social and ethical criticism, and that the aesthetic is inextricably, even if problematically, bound up with the ethical.[90]

Miller suggests that the type of relations encouraged by Bishop are often exploitative and abusive. Since the ethical nature of the relationship should matter to the aesthetic value of art, to put it simply, bad relationships can't make for good art.

Liam Gillick, one of the artists who are often associated with relational aesthetics, has also responded critically to Bishop's understanding of the term and to the alternative she offered. Firstly, he claims that relational aesthetics should not be read as a theory for a new art genre, but rather as the result of Bourriaud's conversations with the mentioned artists, attempting to complicate the earlier simplistic reading of some of the works involved in an exhibition curated by Bourriaud.[91] In this new reading, claims Gillick, relational aesthetics is not participation per se, nor does the audience complete the work—two common misconceptions. Gillick gives his own understanding of the practices associated with relational aesthetics, differentiating his interpretation from both Bourriaud and Bishop. He suggests that his work and the work of some of his peers is more related to the lineage of conceptual artists like Gordon Matta Clark or Daniel Burn, who solicit the viewer for the purpose of creating self-

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[90] Miller, 'Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond',166.

[91] The exhibition *Traffic* at the CAPC Bordeaux, 1996.

Gillick, Letters and Responses, *October*, 98.

reflexivity and alienation.[92] In other words, they are more in line with institutional critique, and the spaces they create are aimed at politicising the art institutions, rather than conveniently increasing their audience reach. Gillick speaks against the placing of himself and other relational aesthetics-affiliated artists in opposition to artists like Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn; this opposition, offered by Bishop, regarded relational aesthetic artists as being naive and unpolitical, and the others, defined by Bishop as relational antagonists, as critically pessimistic. He claims that both 'sides' are being used to construct a theory that simplifies their individual practices and intentions; that all of them are, rather, engaged in 'an ongoing sequence of arguments... (that) is a limited yet effective demonstration of the potential of a new recognition of tensions within established models of social relations.'[93] If anything, writes Gillick, Sierra and Hirschhorn are the ones who rely on a 'simple minded

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[92] This approach is related to the connection drawn by Grant Kester between the conceptual artists of the 1960s and 1970s, and later dialogic practices of artists such as Haans Haacke or Mirele Laderman Ukeles, affiliated with institutional critique:

> What I am pointing to, then, in the art of the 1960s and 1970s is a relatively subtle movement away from the artwork as self-contained entity and towards a more dialogical relationship to the viewer. Eventually the nominally "collaborative" orientation of Graham's video installations or Acconci's performances (which tend to interpolate the viewer primarily as a physical presence...) gives way to an approach in which collaboration is more complex and reflexive...common to all of these artists is an interest in the interaction between the durational and the dialogical.'

Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 60–61.

[93] Gillick, Letters and Responses, *October*, 102.

understanding of social relations'.[94] Gillick claimed that while his works were ethical but immoral, Santiago Sierra's were moralistic but unethical. Differentiating between ethics and morals could open up new possibilities for reading participatory artworks beyond the question of whether they're ethical or not, which seems to be the most common prism for their examination, as I will continue to discuss in the upcoming chapters.[95]

Gillick writes that his own work does not simplistically suggest that dialogue is in and of itself democratic. However, he also doesn't fully explain what his work does, as Bishop remarks in her short reply to his response.[96] Bishop writes that what she was after in her critique of relational aesthetics was to examine the politicality of a work of art through the role and experience of the viewers, and that she regrets that Gillick hasn't suggested an alternative reading of his works through this prism. But Gillick seems to be rejecting exactly this prism, which asks him to not discuss the work through his conceptual intention. He is asked, both by Bishop and by Bourriaud, to let go of his intention and its context, in favour of the viewer's interpretation. In a way, this is a duel between an artist who wishes to hold on to his authorship, along with its ambivalence and sophistication, and an art critique and a curator, who both want to take control over the meaning of the work, and perhaps also make it more accessible. While they claim that relational aesthetics works delegate authorship to the audience,

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[94] Ibid., 106.

[95] This last claim was made by Gillick in a one-on-one conversation we had at a private event during Art Basel 2021, and he has generously encouraged me to use it and develop it further.

[96] Claire Bishop responds, Letters and Responses, *October*, vol. 115 (Winter 2006), 107.

it seems that both Bishop and Bourriaud are taking authorship of these works through writing about them. Ironically, it is Bishop herself who is later accused by Grant Kester of insisting on viewing the works via their artistic intention and not their participatory qualities, as I will soon show.

In her recent book, Anna Alkistis Kontopoulou offers a new critique of relational aesthetics, as well as an alternative perception of what it could be, from a curatorial position. Kontopoulou claims that while Bourriaud's theory offered a critique of the commodification of the art object, it didn't position itself critically in relation to the commodification of the subject, meaning the social relation in light of capitalist forms of exchange. In addition, it didn't offer an alternative relationality that could encourage an emancipatory curatorial practice. Kontopoulou suggests considering relationality as a form of participation, via a political economic critique. She asks, giving examples from her own curatorial practice, whether it is possible to curate participatory or relational practices, involving the curation of subjects rather than objects, without 'consensual management by way of curatorial 'order'.[97] Following the practice of the UK-based collective Ultra-Red, she suggests instead a radical curatorial practice that involves organised listening and attempts to produce knowledge that activates social relations and collectivises agency, a practice that contributes to 'moving beyond that which one already knows they know and into a collective unconscious of desires.'[98]

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[97] Alkistis Kontopoulou, *Curation of Autonomy*, 9–12.

[98] Ibid., 16.

Kontopoulou's reflexivity, her embodied form of research and her call to consider organisation as the true radical curatorial act,[99] offers connections to my own practice and research; I will weave these threads by looking at case studies from my own practice, while expanding on the notion of curatorial authorship and how it further complicates the relationship between artist, audiences and participants, in the upcoming chapters.

2.3.2 Relational Antagonisms

In her later writings, Claire Bishop continued to develop and clarify her concept of relational antagonisms. Following a survey of the history, theory, characteristics and limitations of participatory art in the neoliberal era, she described the rise of participatory art as being a counterpart to the culture of the spectacle.[100] She defined 'spectacle' mainly via Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967),[101] criticising a passive and numb capitalist society in which social experience is mediated by images: 'either "diffused" images of consumerism or "concentrated" images of the leader.'[102] In that regard, participation offers an alternative as it is art in action (or as action) that leaves behind the notion of a spectator as a prerequisite to art: everybody can participate. But can they?

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[99] Ibid., 19.

[100] Bishop, *Artificial Hells.*

[101] Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith, (New York: Zone Books, [1967] 2012) and Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19–20.

[102] Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?', 36.

Bishop differentiated between the various forms or levels of participation in participatory practices and prioritises the ones that create a conflictual relationship between the artist and the participants, raising the question of whether one should participate or refuse. She discussed the tension and debate between the supporters of ethical amelioration that fills in for failing social agencies, as opposed to another sector of the art world that supports art as questioning systems of value and morality:

> This desire to activate the audience in participatory art is at the same time a drive to emancipate it from a state of alienation induced by the dominant ideological order—be this consumer capitalism, totalitarian socialism, or military dictatorship. Beginning from this premise, participatory art aims to restore and realise a communal, collective space of shared social engagement. But this is achieved in different ways: either through constructivist gestures of social impact, which refute the injustice of the world by proposing an alternative, or through a nihilist redoubling of alienation, which negates the world's injustice and illogicality on its own terms. In both instances, the work seeks to forge a collective, co-authoring, participatory social body—but one does this affirmatively (through utopian realisation), the other indirectly (through the negation of negation).[103]

Bishop discusses the writing of Jacques Rancière, who distinguishes between metapolitical art and art that reflects a specific party agenda. Whereas the first form of art opens up into the aesthetic and poetic sphere, the second limits and flattens the message. Bishop's reading of Rancière defines the aesthetic, in the

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[103] Bishop, ‚Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?', 36, and *Artificial Hells*, 275.

context of social, participatory art, as the ability to think in terms of contradictions—to believe in the autonomy of art as well as in its ability to instigate change. According to Bishop, there is no need to resolve these contradictions by means of a consensual ethical process that relegates the aesthetic and the artistic to the margins, or alternatively by means of formalist art that refuses to take a stance. Good participatory art, according to Bishop, will enable the ethical, the aesthetic, and the political to coexist, and will build on the antagonisms, contrasts, provocations, uncertainty, and ambiguousness to which their coexistence gives rise.[104]

Jason Miller, whose previously discussed critical article was written a few years after Bishop's *Artificial Hells*, mentioned Santiago Sierra as one of the main examples of relational antagonism's core problematics. Sierra extenuates and enhances exploitative and dehumanising relationships by duplicating or exaggerating them in an art setting as a sort of spectacle. For Bishop, this is intended to shock the bourgeois into critical awareness and action. However, Miller suggests that in addition, Sierra's work in fact relies heavily on ethical judgment:

> Indeed, art that evokes 'sensations of unease and discomfort rather than belonging' has aesthetic value only in relation to the presumed ethical value of raising consciousness by means of these sensations…It is on this assumption that the apparent ethical violations enacted in Sierra's work are defended in the name of art. Aesthetically rendered exploitation is presumed to be not only qualitatively distinct from exploitation as

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[104] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 26–30.

such, but ethically privileged, insofar as it is in the bigger business of raising awareness via artistic provocation.[105]

Bishop's theory relates to Laclau and Mouffe's notion of antagonisms,[106] which she develops into a suggestion for an artistic practice. Laclau and Mouffe offer a form of radical democracy that does not seek consensus, aiming to encourage tension without reconsolidating differences.[107] As Bishop puts it, they call for a society in which 'relations of conflict are being sustained, not erased.'[108] Translating this notion from the political sphere to the aesthetic one, Bishop frames relational aesthetics as related to a consensus-based politics, and offers instead relational antagonism, as the aesthetic equivalent of relations of dissent and confrontation. The notion of antagonisms and a practice which encourages difference and a conflictual dialogue stands at the heart of my curatorial practice, and I will return to this notion throughout the thesis, attempting to establish nuanced possibilities and potentially unmarked territories related to the various theoretical threads already sketched.

Going back to Mouffe and Laclau, their transference of a political concept into an aesthetic sphere attracted several critical responses. Mouffe clarified that she is in fact calling for an agonistic relation rather than an antagonistic one—

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[105] Miller, Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond',172.

[106] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*

[107] Miller, Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond', 173.

[108] Bishop, 'Antagonisms and Relational Aesthetics', 65.

the first describing a democracy that involves difference and disagreements, and the second a confrontation for its own sake. The agonistic approach is not based solely on refusal but is intended to offer new models of collective identity that expose what the dominant culture is trying to hide.[109] Miller criticised Bishop for interpreting Mouffe and Laclau's theory as encouraging a nihilistic mirroring of the world rather than as offering a productive vision or an alternative.[110] Gillick suggested that this social theory should not be transferred to an art discourse at all, as it undermines the very structure of an art world. He also protested its translation as a mere reflection of what is wrong with the world:

> Things get truly interesting when art goes beyond a reflection of the rejected choices of the dominant culture and attempts to address the actual processes that shape our contemporary environment. This is the true nature of Mouffe's plea for a more sophisticated understanding of the paradox of liberal democracy, which concerns the recognition of the antagonism suppressed within consensus-based models of social democracy, not merely a simple two-way relationship between the

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[109] Chantal Mouffe, keynote presentation at the Cork Caucus event in 2005. Published in *Cork Caucus: On Art, Possibility and Democracy,* (Cork, Ireland: National Sculpture Factory, 2005), 162.

Via Miller, *October*, 174.

[110] Miller, Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond', 175.

existing sociopolitical model and an enlightened demonstration of its failings.[111]

In my opinion, Gillick and Miller's criticism of Bishop simplifies her stance. This is mostly evident in Miller's reading as he ignores some of the claims Bishop made in her more recent writings. Miller suggests that bad ethics equal bad aesthetics, and that Bishop encourages bad ethics as she described their display via artistic representation as aesthetically superior. But Bishop claimed no such thing; instead, she called for an ambiguity and confusion that confronts the viewer with the decision of whether to participate or to refuse: whether to be an accomplice or an agent of change. It was not a nihilist spectacle of abuse that Bishop was after, but a counter spectacle aimed to arouse alienation rather than enjoyment.

Miller claims that Bishop's approach to artists such as Sierra and Schlingensief justifies exploitation aesthetically, as it only mimics or reproduces exploitative relations. Bishop however does not perceive these acts as merely mimicking reality; she is interested in the accentuation of real exploitation existing in the political realm, within an aesthetic realm. This could be perceived, in the lineage of the avant-garde, as a sort of therapeutic shock, exposing the participant to traumatic elements that he or she otherwise couldn't bear or acknowledge, under safe or controlled conditions. However, this raises another question: if the aesthetic realm is indeed 'safe', does this not take away the sting from the experience, letting the privileged audience nod their heads in

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[111] Gillick, *October*, 100–101.

regret and go home to forget about it? Or, perhaps, the aesthetic sphere is safe for some but not for others?[112]

Grant Kester has also publicly corresponded with Bishop, clarifying his own stance as well as criticising hers.[113] As aforesaid, Kester objects to the avant-garde's tendency to identify good art with shock revelations, or its dependency on the genius artist to bring this revelation to the supposedly ignorant people. In his response to Bishop he differentiated between the historical role of the revolutionary and that of the artist, or between 'aesthetic and political protocols': the revolutionary exposes the proletariat to the real nature of the dominant forces via documentation or education. His militant means are preserved for the bourgeoisie, whom he provokes in order to induce a violent

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[112] I will attempt to look closely at these questions in the next chapter, through a work that is often associated with Bishop's theory and mentioned by her, Christoph Schlingensief's *Auslander Raus*. Paul Poet's documentary *Auslander Raus-Schlingensief's Container* (2001), was part of a project I curated, *The Infiltrators (2015)*. In addition, I will return to the question of safety in participatory antagonistic practices in my conversation with Florian Malzachar and Jonas Staal.

[113] Kester, 'The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent'. I should mention that Kester wrote this text in 2012, touching on some of his earlier ideas from *Conversation Pieces* (2004), when he most likely had not read Bishops' *Artificial Hells* yet (published that same year), and mostly responded to her earlier essay 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004), as well as to 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum* (February 2006), which laid the grounds for *Artificial Hells*. Miller wrote his text in 2016 and some of his claims resonate with Kester's.

response from the institution of power, which in turn will mobilise the working class to action.

> In doing so, the revolutionary potentially increases the suffering of the working class (as they become targets for possible retaliation), but with the goal of securing their ultimate liberation. The revolutionary doesn't attack the working class directly, but rather hopes to incite the state to do so in order to precipitate a revolutionary 'event'. The revolutionary's violence is reserved for the bourgeoisie, who will first be provoked, and then destroyed.[114]

Kester blames the artists, who Bishop champions, for collapsing the distinction between the revolutionary and the artist, as they turn their violence towards both proletarian and bourgeoisie and use provocation as a pedagogical tool. Kester is also critical towards Mouffe and Laclau's theory, and not only to Bishop's interpretation of it. For him, leaning on the knowledge of poststructuralist philosophers in order to develop a political theory poses a failure similar to the one inherent in leaning on the artist to inspire revolution, as it remains too abstract to turn into action. As he wrote ironically: 'If we could only imbue the broader public with the reflective consciousness of a Derrida or a Lacan, a more just and equitable society would inevitably follow.'[115]

Kester points out that all revolutionary changes in history involved armed or violent conflicts, and forms of refusal such as occupations, riots, boycotts or strikes, and without these antagonistic forms of protest the change would not

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[114] Kester, 'The Sound of Breaking Glass, Part II: Agonism and the Taming of Dissent', 6.

[115] Ibid., 8.

have happened. Thus, the call for turning all antagonisms to agonisms and all enemies to adversaries for the purpose of inspiring real change is problematic. In addition, while Mouffe calls for artistic 'counter-hegemonic interventions whose objective is to occupy the public space in order to disrupt the smooth image that corporate capitalism is trying to spread, bringing to the fore its repressive character',[116] she does not examine if and how these interventions affect the public.

Kester protests that while Bishop accuses him of perceiving all collaborative practices to be equally important and judging them only according to ethical criteria, she in fact dismisses all forms of collaborative reflexive practice. In Kester's reading of Bishop, Every work that explored delegating agency and authority to the participants is described by her as relying on ethics rather than on aesthetics and as dangerously encouraging consensus, and Bishop is most interested in defending the distance between the privileged artist and the viewer.

I think that neither Kester nor Bishop do justice to the other's theory. Bishop criticises Kester for only examining the ethical side of participatory art, but Kester describes his work in the realm of aesthetics, writing that not only the visual but also the dialogic could be defined as aesthetic. In addition, while Kester calls for dialogic practice, he does not, as Bishop claims, deem every form of collaboration as important, and he does not encourage consensus. In fact, he claims that dialogic art is about exploring differences.[117] As aforesaid,

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[116] Ibid., 10.

[117] For example here: 'an investigation of speech acts and dialogue and an investigation of intersubjective ethics and identity formation', Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 108.

Kester encourages working with existing communities, but not in order to avoid conflicts; rather, for the purpose of overcoming the blind spots of a privileged foreign artist. Kester suggests that dialogic art's purpose is to challenge the perceptions of a given community and create a more complex understanding of this community from the outside.[118] This implies that Kester, the same as Bishop, prefers nonconsensual relations between artist and community.

At the same time, Kester includes Bishop as one of those critics of dialogic art who await a visual or sensory pleasure and get disappointed when they don't experience it. These critics, he writes, judge dialogic art according to a pleasure-based methodology, rather than one based on the quality of communicative interactions.[119] However, Bishop's relationship with the visual is more complex. She calls for art that causes discomfort and confusion, and that does not adhere to pleasure in a passive, noncritical way. I will return to the kind of pleasure it does call for shortly, when I discuss conflictual curating. Additionally, Kester discourages critics from looking for a work of art's political efficacy, as dialogic art should not be perceived as pure activism.[120] However, his writings reveal that his emphasis is not only on the quality of the dialogic relations, but also on the activist outcome of the work as potentially enhancing solidarity.[121] He himself often turns to examining the efficacy of a work of art in terms of political impact, for example in his account of WochenKlausur's projects.

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[118] Ibid., 115.

[119] Ibid., 10.

[120] Ibid., 11.

[121] Ibid.,115–116.

It seems that one thing Kester and Bishops' arguments share is that they both lean heavily on the question of ethics in a work in order to define and judge its aesthetics. However, while Kester emphasises the importance of the ethics of the process, or the dialogue (which at times serves as the work itself) as manifesting a wider perception of ethics in society, Bishop emphasises the importance of an artist's ability to question existing systems of value and perceptions of morality, or as she puts it: 'Art's relationship to the social is either underpinned by morality or it is underpinned by freedom.'[122]

2.4 Art and Politics Fight in the Trenches: Conflictual Aesthetics and Conflictual Curating

2.4.1 Setting the Ground for Participatory Curating

What kind of aesthetics and ethics would conflictual participatory curating entail, following these readings of Kester and Bishop? How can we borrow their definitions and critiques of participatory art, for the purposes of participatory curating? Can participatory curating be both dialogic and conflictual? Looking at participatory projects through a curatorial lens, the process involves the mediation of four different perspectives: that of the artists, the art institution, the participants, and the audience. The relationships created with all involved are often more complex than a mere judgement of ethical or unethical, or trying to fix the world versus emphasising how bad it is. The production of the work, from a curatorial perspective, is an intricate process of conversations, as I will show later through various case studies, and in that sense, it is not much different from how Kester describes dialogic art. It is not the object of production that

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[122] Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?', 38.

defines or mirrors its ethics, but the process of production itself. The organisation of participatory practices is never separate from the organisation of its exhibition and should not be understood as such. Thus, judging a participatory project solely via objects (or documentations) shown in an exhibition always amplifies a lacuna of what cannot be shown: the intimate relations of participation.[123] However, curating participatory art is not the same as participatory curating—participatory curating would be a reflexive examination, or critique, of what it means to delegate authority as a curator, in the same that good participatory art, according to Bishop, is a critique of participatory art.[124]

At the same time, emphasising a process and considering its ethics does not mean an acceptance of existing definitions of morals, as Claire Bishop has claimed. Bishop wrote that ethical criteria are the easy solution to describing the complexity of participatory practices and that emphasising process over product, or process as product, as a counterpart to capitalism, results in valuing consensual collaboration over artistic mastery and individualism.[125] However, my claim is that emphasising process and ethics does not imply a support of consensual participation, nor does it imply total annihilation of notions of authorship or individuality. Participatory art cannot be read as a product because it can never be fully produced. It is rather a never-ending process of negotiations, of tensions. The curatorial factor of it is reflexive in a way similar

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[123] Bishop, Aritificial Hells, 19–20.

[124] Bishop stated that the better examples of social practices often constituted a critique on participatory art, such as in the case of Schlingensief's *Please Love Austria*, which I will refer to in further chapters.

[125] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle,* and Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 19–20.

to how Kester describes the reflexivity of dialogic art, but it is also antagonistic in a similar way to what Bishop described as antagonistic participation. Through the very definition of participation versus collaboration, if we define participation critically as I attempt to do in this thesis, there lies an inherent distance from encouraging consensus as an erasure of difference. I will explain this further in the next chapter through the example of an exhibition I curated entitled *The Infiltrators,* and through other examples subsequently.

At the same time, a common blind spot in the theoretical examinations of participatory practices is the minimal attention given to their exhibition, which is crucial especially from a curatorial point of view. Grant Kester acknowledged in the conclusion of his book Conversation Pieces that this subject requires further examination. Claire Bishop discussed it in a very appealing manner, however one that is difficult to interpret in a practical way. In her reading of Rancière, Bishop relies on and amplifies his argument for a mediating object: 'a spectacle that stands between the idea of the artist and the feeling and interpretation of the spectator'.[126] Endorsing a spectacle is somewhat confusing in an article that begins with a notion of the spectacle as a cause for alienation and passivity. However, Bishop explains this further in *Artificial Hells*. She writes that while with any art that uses people as a medium ethics is always dominant, the task is to examine how this relates to concerns of aesthetics. Bishop turns to Lacan's notion of *jouissance* (a term which I'll return to later), explaining its meaning as acting upon one's unconscious desire, which is ethically superior to modifying oneself for the eyes of the big other. Translated to aesthetics, this means enjoyment through disruption, or perceiving the relationship between an individual to a collective as painful pleasure. What kind

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[126] Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?', 40.

of participatory artworks would have these aesthetics? Ones that are highly authored, mix reality with fiction, where 'intersubjective relations are not an end in themselves, but serve to explore and disentangle a more complex knot of social concerns about political engagement, affect, inequality, narcissism, class, and behavioral protocols.'[127] While she relates the ethical reasoning usually affiliated with the discourse around participatory art to a hybrid between good Christian morals and anticapitalism, she asks for a lingering in the realm of aesthetics where paradox, perversity and negation are crucial, in the same way that dissensus is crucial for the political—where art is not only art but also not entirely real life.[128]

In practical terms, Bishop gives the example of Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave*, as tactically, ethically and aesthetically exemplifying her intention. She emphasises that in his reenactment of the miners' confrontation with the police, the interest lies in what she calls the grey artistic work of participatory art, or what Pawel Althamer calls 'directed reality',[129] in his decision as to how much of it should be scripted and how much to leave in the hands of the participants.[130] These decisions were manifested and accentuated through the various forms in which the work was exhibited: Mike Figgis's documentary about the work and its historical context, and an archival installation of documents and objects from the historical strike and riot and from the reenactment. Thus, the work is a double archive of both the original events and the artistic interpretation, and despite its direct political references, allows for

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[127] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 39.

[128] Ibid., 40.

[129] Pawel Althamer, '1000 Words', *Artforum*, (May 2006), 268–9.

[130] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 33.

an ambiguity regarding its precise stand. At the same time, according to Bishop, while it is ethically commendable in its form of collaboration with the miners, it was pitched to the battle reenactment societies as politically neutral, in order to secure their collaboration.[131] Is pitching something manipulatively inherently unethical, or does it depend who pitches and who is being pitched to? In that sense, how is the reenactment society different, as a participant or collaborator in the work, to the miners? And is it indeed commendably ethical, or psychologically responsible, to ask the miners to repeat a traumatic event and even make a spectacle out of it? Bishop does not answer these questions; she leaves them open to support her claim that a true political artwork can accommodate contradictory stands and involves a directorial triggering of events rather than either a self-suppressing facilitation or total authorship.

Another important aspect of the work's exhibitory format, according to Bishop, is its consideration of different circuits of audiences: the participants in the performance, the audience watching the film, and the viewers in the exhibition. Via these multiple layers the work mixes the art-historical categories of history painting, performance, documentary, archive and community theatre, and with them refutes the traditional passive-active category that claims that a presentation in a gallery or museum should appeal only to passive middle-class gallery-goers. Bishop points out that the passive-active binary encourages inequality as it assumes that the marginalised people can only be emancipated by direct participation, while the middle class can critically reflect while watching the work in a museum. As an alternative, she offers Rancière's 'third term', the mediating art object, as a form of engagement to which both artist

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[131] Ibid., 35.

and viewer can relate.[132] However, as I will specify in my next case study examination, the problem is that in order to change perceptions of participation as social inclusion, or to consider art viewing as a form of participation, one needs to have diverse participants not only in the work process but also in the gallery. As I will show, it is not an easy task to shift identity perceptions, not only of art critics and art institutions but also of the participants or viewers themselves. In addition, this still does not answer one of our main questions: what kind of curating, in this case in terms of the exhibition itself, is participatory? We could try switching the dramaturge with a curator in Bishop's quote of Rancière :

> Even when the dramaturge or the performer does not know what he wants the spectator to do, he knows at least that the spectator has to do something, switch from passivity to activity…The less the dramaturge knows what the spectators must do as a collective, the more he knows that they must become a collective, turn their mere agglomeration into the community that they virtually are.[133]

While encouraging the dramaturge/curator to think of the spectators as a potential collective or community might sound somewhat vague or utopic, Bishop emphasises that she doesn't mean collective in the consensual sense.[134] In addition, she doesn't call for a total erasure of authorship which

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[132] Ibid., 36–38.

[133] Jacques Rancière, 'The Emancipated Spectator', trans. Gregory Elliott, *Artforum,* (March 2007), 271–80, 277–278.

[134] One should also remember that when Bishop wrote *Artificial Hells* in 2012, it was only the beginning of a decade that marked the further collapse of borders between art and politics and the infiltration of the influential jargon of protest movements into

invites simplistic identitarian oppositions and generalisations.[135] Her rendering of the spectators as a temporary community that encompasses difference will be further probed in the thesis, juxtaposed with Irit Rogoff's perceptions of embodied criticality. However, the ambiguity of Ranciere's description, or the lack of exemplification of what this activity of the spectators' community should entail, is not deciphered by Bishop. Another quote of Rancière's employed by Bishop emphasises that one of the main ways in which he informed her thinking is to avoid a didactic critical position in favour of ambiguity:[136]

> Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect; the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification. In fact, this ideal effect is always the

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participatory art practices (as I will further explain in the upcoming chapters), where terms such as collective, consensus and compost seem to have become a rising trend.

[135] 'In insisting upon consensual dialogue, sensitivity to difference risks becoming a new kind of repressive norm—one in which artistic strategies of disruption, intervention or over-identification are immediately ruled out as "unethical" because all forms of authorship are equated with authority and indicated as totalizing. Such a denigration of authorship allows simplistic oppositions to remain in place: active versus passive viewers, egotistical versus collaborative artist, privileged versus needy community, aesthetic complexity versus simple expression, old autonomy versus convivial community.' Ibid., 25.

[136] Ibid., 29.

object of a negotiation between oppositions, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy all political meaning.[137]

What is this uncanny effect, between readability and the collapse of meaning? Does it have to be a shock in the avant-garde sense? Does its political agency lie in its inability to be fully understood or in the enabling of multiple possible interpretations? As a curator, the question of being didactic versus being ambiguous is acute, as one is expected to mediate complex meaning in an accessible way. In addition, the ethical freedom which Bishop wishes to attribute to the artist is not easily attributable to the curator, who is often tied to an institution, which is in turn tied to forms of funding that might be taken away if one is understood to be offensive or provocative. As I have stated in the introduction, this ethical imperative is used today as a tentative warning to curators to not cross the (political) line and adhere to mainstream agendas.

What I would like to explore in the upcoming chapters, through a curatorial lens, is whether there exists a participatory (curatorial) practice that is also political, with this politicality lying in its nuanced and relational perception of the political as neither a moralistic approach that attempts to change the world through consensus and imagined equality, nor through the replication or mirroring of exploitation. Not a utopian realisation versus a negation of negation; not morality versus freedom.[138] Something else. I borrow several characteristics from these critical theories of participatory artistic practices in order to derive from them my own approach to participatory curating: among these are suspicion towards agency and authority, reflexivity regarding privileges and

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[137] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics, the Distribution of the Sensible*, ed. and trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 63.

[138] Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?', 38.

blind spots, and the encouragement of confusing, awkward and conflictual moments, without necessarily deeming these as unethical. However, taking a nuanced approach could clash with the wish to be political, as Oliver Marchart renders in his critical theory of 'conflictual aesthetics'. His position resonates in retrospect with many of my curatorial projects, as I will show in the upcoming chapters.

2.4.2 Conflictual Aesthetics

Oliver Marchart[139] offers a way in which political art practices could infiltrate and impact the political sphere. It is important to emphasise that he presumes that political art should directly impact real politics, a point that Bishop approaches differently[140] and about which Kester, as I've shown before, is ambivalent. Marchart proposes seeing the wave of revolts of the last decade as a third world revolution.[141] He suggests that as in past revolutions, where the short-term effects of protest were not the success of the revolutionary

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[139] Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics.*

[140] As I have explained before, Bishop calls for a separation of art from aspirations of direct social or political change, For example in 'Participation and Spectacle', 45, where she calls for leftist political movements to act in parallel to artists and implement the political project that artists, with their 'inventive forms of negation' help to imagine the world in a different way.

[141] The second world revolution starting in 1968, and the first being the events of 1848 in Europe, among them the French Revolution of 1848.

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goals, but the long-term effects were very significant, the implications of this third wave are yet to be seen.

In his theory of political art practices, Marchart disagrees with Bishop's reading of Rancière: he claims that Rancière provides the art world with what he calls 'the spontaneous ideology of the art field'—that every artistic act is already political since it reframes material and symbolic space, and thus there is no need for explicitly political art. Marchart explains ironically how this philosophy legitimises the bad reputation of activist art:

> This ideology is structured around a paradoxical trope: not that art, according to its functionaries, is un-political. It is political, but it is political, we are told, precisely in being not political. Art's true 'politics' resides in its complexity, obliqueness, and remoteness from every political practice in the strict sense. The less art is explicitly political, we are led to conclude from this, the more political it actually is. For this peculiar reason, we do not need explicitly political art.[142]

To confront this apoliticality, Marchart calls for a 'conflictual aesthetics':

> an aesthetics which is conflictual in a double sense: it conflicts with the aesthetics of the spontaneous ideologists of the art field (the aesthetics of simplistic complexity); and it seeks to work out the political implications of conflictual artistic practice. It is, in this double sense, both a conflicting aesthetics and an aesthetics of conflict.[143]

Marchart claims that propaganda doesn't have to be a manipulation, and that political art should use counterpropaganda; a dissensual and minoritarian

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[142] Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics*, 6–7.

[143] Ibid., 15.

propaganda against a doxa defended by the hegemonic forces with their supposedly consensual propaganda, in order to 'wake up people from their dogmatic slumber'.[144] He gives examples of projects that match his definitions of conflictual aesthetics, projects that propagate, agitate and organise. Among them he mentions Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir as well as Liberate Tate, two groups which I will return to as they have inspired my survey of political choirs, and he often addresses the actions of the Israeli performance group Public Movement, on which I will expand later through my curatorial perspective. The most acute conflict that arises from this perspective, in relation to conflictual artistic and curatorial practices in general and to my own practice in particular, is the conflict between participating and refusing; within the temporary community created by a participatory and political project, there is always a tension between the individual and the group, related to what Marchart describes as being active and passive at the same time, or escaping the traditional dichotomy between passivity and activity. While engaged in what he refers to as an 'artivist' project (he uses the term following Chantal Mouffe's definition with some reservations), a subject is, in the language of Louis Althusser, interpellated by 'ideological state apparatuses', as well as rearticulating the conditions of his or her own subjection.[145]

The question of passivity versus activity is particularly interesting for the curatorial perspective, which Marchart addresses directly. He attempts to define what entails a political curatorial action, mainly as being collective,

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[144] Ibid., 23.

[145] Ibid., 26. I will return to the conflict of interpellation from a performative perspective in a later chapter.

strategic, organised and conflictual.[146] It's important to differentiate between Bishop's notions of participation and Marchart's definition of collaboration, although they both speak about creating a conflictual collectivity via the artistic act. While Marchart speaks about a collaboration between a group of artists or curators, Bishop discusses the participation of a temporary community in a work authored and directed by an artist, particularly various forms of nonconsensual participation. Thus, both Bishop and Marchart separate the degree of knowledge and understanding of the participants from the knowledgeable authority of the collaborating artists or curators. In both cases the participants are confronted with a certain ambiguity regarding the real intent of the artists or curators, while they are being interpellated and confronted by the work. In that sense the projects encouraged by Marchart are not that far off from those championed by Bishop, despite the differences in emphases.

2.4.3 Conflictual Curating

As aforesaid, one of the questions that I will address in the upcoming chapters, in relation to the theories championing conflictual participation, is what political participatory curating would entail, within the realm of participatory practices. Perhaps we could call it conflictual participatory curating. Should curators engage in agitative counterpropaganda and if so, how would this differentiate from their artistic engagements? In a way, the organisational aspect is already inherent to curating, but collectivity is not necessarily. Fluctuation between passivity and activity is also an inherent part of curating, particularly if one thinks about the contradictions between ambitious authorial aspirations and the need to mediate conflicting needs of artist, institutions and communities. Going

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[146] Ibid., 25, 115.

back to Marchart, I will use his definition of the curatorial function as the organisation of public space. Marchart calls political curatorial practice 'organising the impossible',[147] since he claims that it is impossible to self-generate antagonisms, but space becomes public in the real sense only when antagonism occurs. I would like to raise a question regarding the role of the curator, in regard to organising the impossible, from a different angle.

Curating entails much bureaucracy, diplomacy, psychology, and often unpaid emotional labour. What if we define 'to organise the impossible' as trying to infiltrate the bureaucracy of hegemonic institutions? Perhaps these aspects of curatorial actions are where the true political sense of curating lies, in the unheroic, behind the scenes conflicts that no one ever hears about? Political, as they create tiny fractures in the hegemonic institution's function—a function which is designed according to the agendas of governing bodies. From another angle, we can think about curating political art as enabling an artistic idea that might seem impossible to implement, by navigating it through these cracks in the system, which is only possible to do from inside the system. In that sense, the artistic act turns curating into a collective organisational effort, at times despite its own will, because to organise the impossible, you'll need a village. At the same time, another perspective could claim that the mediation and diplomacy aspects of curatorial practice aim to make real conflicts disappear, in order to be able to produce imagined conflicts; from this perspective, they are in fact antipolitical. Either way, throughout this thesis, via several case studies, both mine and others', I will look at the act of curating as occurring in the liminal space between enabling the appearance of a conflict and the taming of its borders. In addition, I will examine the forms of collectivisation and

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[147] Ibid., 95.

participation that occurred in each case, between the artists and the curator, the artists and the community, and the curator and the community, as well as the audience's participation and critical response, in order to reflect on the blurred boundaries between care and control.

3. Case Study: Infiltrating Borders With Participatory Art: The Case of *The Infiltrators*

In the spring of 2014, I curated *The Infiltrators* at Artport, a nonprofit art organisation located in South Tel Aviv.[1] The exhibition included four participatory projects: newly commissioned works with Ghana Think Tank and Documentary Embroidery, as well as a project by Daniel Landau, involving the participation of African asylum seekers in Israel. These projects were concerned with the place of asylum seekers in the local sphere, but echoed the existence of a global crisis. This crisis was also mirrored in the fourth work, *Ausländer Raus! Schlingensief's Container*, directed by Paul Poet in 2001, documenting Christoph Schlingensief's infamous theatre production *Please Love Austria*, where he housed asylum seekers in a container in the heart of Vienna and asked the audience to vote who they would like to deport from Austria.

The Infiltrators was created in the wake of the refugee crisis in Europe, and while the issues concerning African asylum seekers in Israel were constantly on the news. In the couple of years in which we were working on the exhibition, a detention centre opened in the Israeli Negev desert and more and more

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[1] *The Infiltrators*, Artport, Tel Aviv, 2014. Artists: Daniel Landau, Paul Poet, Ghana Think Tank, Documentary Embroidery. Curated by Maayan Sheleff. http://cargocollective.com/INFILTRATORS

Although this project took place a couple of years before I started working on my PhD, it very much reflects my overall position on participation. It also informed the shifts in my practice that followed, and thus is an important case study to examine in this context.

asylum seekers were sent to it every day. A vast protest has begun—the largest self-organised asylum seekers' protest in the history of Israel.[2]

The complex status and state of refugees escaping from war and political turmoil, and their treatment in Western countries where they seek refuge, served as the subject of numerous contemporary artworks in the recent decade, some of which have been participatory or collaborative and with activist aims. Some examples which were created around the same time as *The Infiltrators*, based on participatory methods and on the production of shared knowledge, were *The Silent University*, initiated by artist Ahmet Ögüt (2012);[3] *The New World Academy* by artist Jonas Staal in Bak, Utrecht, with collaborating organisations the National Democratic Movement of the Philippines, the collective of refugees We Are Here, and the Pirate Parties International (2013–2014);[4] Forensic Oceanography (2011–2018), following boats of migrants and refugees in the Mediterranean and exposing how often authorities leave them to die;[5] and the related investigations by Forensic

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[2] See for example Mairav Zonszein,'Asylum Seekers in Israel Globalize Protest', *972 Magazine*, (22 January, 2014) . https://www.972mag.com/asylum-seekers-in-israel-globalize-protest/ Accessed 12 April, 2023.

[3] Florian Malzacher, Pelin Tan, Ahmet Öğüt, eds., *The Silent University, Towards a Transversal Pedagogy*, (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016). https://www.sternberg-press.com/product/the-silent-university-towards-a-transversal-pedagogy/ Accessed 23 April, 2023.

[4] http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/new-world-academy/ Accessed 19 April, 2023.

[5] https://forensic-architecture.org/subdomain/forensic-oceanography Accessed 18 April, 2023.

Architecture, together with Yazda, the global Yazidi organization, into the destruction of the Yazidi cultural heritage (2014–2018).[6]

Much like the artists participating in *The Infiltrators*, these artists have created platforms that undermine the hierarchy and boundaries between art, education and activism, and could potentially be recreated in various locations. The main difference of the aforementioned projects from the works in *The Infiltrators* is that they mostly depart from an exhibition format.[7] Their platforms are manifested mainly in the form of schools, websites and conferences, placing their emphasis on a long-term collaboratory process. If they do exhibit themselves, while the exhibition could take many forms, the purpose is mostly to inform the audience on the activist process and outcome. The works in *The Infiltrators* however, were shown in the format of an exhibition as an end result of a participatory process, and in retrospect, as I'll shortly explain, this was one of the main problems of this project. While its aim was to encourage networks of collaboration and to impact the development of new alliances for the long run, its emphasis on the exhibition, both conceptually and in terms of the use of resources, did not enable a structured and meaningful continuation of the process. This problem manifested in how the artistic acts and their aesthetic outcomes were mediated to the public through the curatorial text, and how they were accepted and understood. Thus, although some collaboratory

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[6] https://forensic-architecture.org/investigation/the-destruction-of-yazidi-cultural-heritage/ Accessed 18 April, 2023.

[7] Even though they occasionally represent themselves in the frame and format of exhibitions, for example, Forensic Oceanography at the Manifesta in Palermo, 2018, Forensic Architecture at Tate Modern (also 2018, on the occasion of their nomination for the Turner Prize), or the Silent University at the Istanbul Biennial 2022.

aspects of *The Infiltrators* did continue after the exhibition, they were not understood as part of the project.

The featured projects in *The Infiltrators* reflect a range of participatory strategies on a shifting scale of conflictual and antagonistic. While Ghana Think Tank offers a platform that calls for an ironic and reflexive collectivity, Schlingensief appropriates and renders extreme the very thing he wishes to protest—a fascist nationalistic interactive propaganda. While his project involves multiple collaborators, it is presented as a work of sole authorship and in fact mocks not only the right wing's supposed collective homogeneity but also the collaborative intentions and processes of left-wing activists. From today's perspective, with the increasing popularity of right-wing rhetoric and their use of 'fake news', it is more relevant than ever.

In Israel, the term 'infiltrators' was used in the past to describe the transgression of the country's political borders in order to commit a terrorist act; the more general meaning of this term is similar—the hostile crossing of enemy lines or the covert transgression of a given territory's borders for the purpose of espionage, a political coup, or conquest. During the last decade, this term has shifted its meaning in Israel, and has commonly been used to refer to Africans, mostly from Sudan and Eritrea, who have crossed the border into Israel; it is unclear who coined this term in relation to the African community in Israel, but it has been used by the government and often echoed by the media. Human rights organisations however insist that the correct term is asylum seekers, or refugees if they have been officially recognised as such (something which rarely occurs in Israel). These terms play a significant role in the discussion of asylum seekers' status and future. One term, 'infiltrators', frames them as law-breaking perpetrators, whilst the other, 'asylum seekers', as victims in need of help. The term 'infiltrators' also fixes the status of border crossers as that of liminal subjects, who remain trapped between here and there, citizens of no

place. Indeed, for over a decade, their legal status and rights have not been officially recognised.

The participating asylum seekers and I chose the term 'infiltrators' as the title of the exhibition after a heated discussion,[8] considering it to be a reappropriation of a derogatory term in order to rethink its meaning. By posing that participatory art can constitute an act of infiltration, we enabled it to take a powerful stance. The term gained layered meanings by making its way from the political sphere into the artistic, and then back into the communal public sphere. It crossed borders in more ways than one—the literal borders between the white cube and the public sphere, as well as the invisible borders with which we define the differences between 'us' and 'them'. Infiltration became a tool to challenge preconceptions and to destabilise power relations, through lingering on the borderline, within the liminal spaces between points of contention. Infiltrating in that sense is the physical and metaphorical manifestation of conflictual curating, an attempt to explore a scale of antagonistic projects, and how they are directed by the artists, experienced by their participants and understood by both audience and art critics.

3.1 Background Information on Asylum Seekers in Israel

Before I delve into the various projects, I would like to describe the sociopolitical conditions involving asylum seekers in Israel that triggered this project. *The*

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[8] The exhibition text was translated from Hebrew to Arabic, English and Tigrinya. Parts of the discussion around the title were about its antagonistic intentions; others were around language differences—for example, one of the Eritrean asylum seekers could not find an adequate translation for the title in Tigrinya, because they only have a term for animals crossing borders illegally, not people.

Infiltrators was born out of a sense of urgency, as a reaction to an acute situation in Israel. At the time of the exhibition, approximately forty-five thousand asylum seekers from Africa, most of whom had fled ethnic or political persecution in Sudan or Eritrea, were living in Israel and asking for recognition as refugees. Israel's policy vis-à-vis these asylum seekers is one of nondeportation, based on the alleged recognition that their life would be endangered if they were sent back to their countries of origin.[9] At the same time, Israel barely examines any such applications for asylum, and applicants have little chance of receiving refugee status.

According to data provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in 2012, approximately when I started to work on the exhibition, 83.6 percent of the Eritreans and 69.3 percent of the Sudanese who submit applications for asylum in various countries are recognised as refugees according to the strict standards of the UN's treaty of refugees. By contrast, the percentage of asylum seekers recognized as such in Israel until that time was 0.2 percent. According to Assaf's (Aid Organisation for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel) spokesperson, in the years leading to the exhibition eighteen thousand refugee status requests were submitted, but only

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[9] Depending on the changing ministers of interior affairs, even this was not always the case, as some deported specific communities (for example South Sudanese) back to their countries in perilous conditions or tried to trade them with a third country. However, no elected government over the years has offered to give them a more stable sanctuary. For more information see for example Laurie Lijnders, 'Deportation of South Sudanese from Israel', *Forced Migration Review*:

https://www.fmreview.org/detention/lijnders Accessed 2 March, 2023 and 'Deportation to a Third Country', ASSAF, https://assaf.org.il/en/about/deportation-2018/ Accessed 2 March, 2023.

fifty received refugee status. The majority of asylum seekers who end up in Israel thus remain in an intermediate state—they are not deported, yet their status is not regulated, and they are not awarded basic rights. In 2022, ten years after the exhibition, around twenty-five thousand asylum seekers remained in Israel, as many were either deported or 'encouraged' to leave through severe pressures, such as abuse through bureaucracy; draconian taxes; problems with health insurance which became more severe during the Covid-19 pandemic; violent racist attacks ignited by politicians, and more.[10]

In Israeli society, the term 'refugee' is especially charged, since it relates both to the Jewish refugees who fled Nazi Europe or who suffered persecution and violence in Arab countries, and to the Palestinian refugees deported from the country in 1948. The consideration of non-Jewish refugees is related, in collective Israeli consciousness, to a potential change in the country's demographic balance and to a threat to Israel's status as an asylum for the Jewish people. This is perhaps one of the reasons for the governmental rhetoric that refers to asylum seekers as 'immigrant workers' or 'infiltrators', the first attempting to render them as looking to improve their economic status rather than fighting for their lives, the second branding them as dangerous and violent. This rhetoric filters down to the street, where it is fused with the real distress of the residents of low socioeconomic areas characterised by a high concentration of asylum seekers, such as the south of Tel Aviv. Thus, the South Tel Aviv neighbourhoods which were already suffering from neglect, and which

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[10] Assaf—The Aid Organisation for Refugees and Asylum Seekers in Israel—is a good source of information and updates:

https://assaf.org.il/en/ Accessed 2 March, 2023.

were home to crime, drug abuse, and prostitution, became the focal point of tensions around the asylum seekers.

3.2 *The Infiltrators* Exhibition

As aforementioned, the exhibition included projects with four artists or artist groups: Ghana Think Tank, Documentary Embroidery, Daniel Landau and Paul Poet. These projects involved different forms of participation, that could be read on the scale between the dialogical (Kester) and the antagonistic (Bishop/Marchart), to use the terms that I discussed in the previous chapter. The curatorial text was published in a catalogue and on a designated website, alongside an additional article by Claire Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?.'[11] In this text Bishop provides an in-depth examination of Schlingensief's container project, as an example of an important and successful antagonistic project. In other words, as I described Bishop's theory previously, an example of provocative participatory art that enables the ethical, the aesthetic, and the political to coexist.

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[11] Claire Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle'. Bishop's article was translated into Hebrew and Arabic and included in the exhibition's catalogue and website, courtesy of Bishop, Creative Time Books and The MIT Press.

Most of the texts for the exhibition were translated from Hebrew into Arabic, English and Tigrinya, as the accessibility of the information to all participants and to potential audiences from among the asylum seeker communities was important. The exhibition's website:

https://cargocollective.com/INFILTRATORS Accessed 1 March, 2023.

While Schlingensief's project could be perceived as being on the antagonistic end of the participation scale, it doesn't easily fall into any category, nor do the other projects in the exhibition. While they all involve dialogue as a main method, and employ a performative durational experience, they differentiate from each other not only in the character of the dialogue, but also in terms of their aesthetic outcome. While Kester admitted he concentrated on analysing the character of the dialogue in the works he wrote about but didn't give much attention to their visual or sensory experience,[12] I would like to explore both aspects in the works included in *The Infiltrators*, as they turned out to be a major element in determining their level of antagonism and how these were understood by viewers and critics.

The exhibition attempted to bring to the surface repressed issues and to expose the lacunas concerning the suffering of both local citizens and asylum seekers through an open discussion with the various participants in the featured projects—asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan, Israeli residents, artists, and community activists. It also attempted to create alliances between the local art, activism and education communities, who often act in related social or political contexts, but seldom meet, collaborate or even acknowledge each other's work in Israel. I believe that the project partly succeeded in its purposes, but also had its own blind spots and failures, which I will touch upon here.

The first project was by artistic duo Documentary Embroidery, Aviv Kruglanski (Spain/Israel) and Vahida Ramujic (Serbia), who employ embroidery as a documentary medium unfolding in real time. They work site specifically in public space, spending long periods of time in various locations, where they speak

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[12] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 12–13.

with inhabitants and passersby. In each case, they create an embroidery work based on people's stories and responses, alongside their own interpretations as artists. At times they ask the participants to draw or write elements that they would like to add to the gradually embroidered patchwork, or invite them to join the act of embroidery.

Their project for *The Infiltrators*, *Notes from Neve-Shaanan* (2014), involved spending a month doing embroidery work in Levinsky Garden, a site that has acquired symbolic value for African asylum seekers: this is in most cases where they first disembark in Israel, after being released from the preliminary absorption and detention facilities; this is where work and community relations are created, as well as the site of social and cultural activities, humanitarian and activist initiatives, demonstrations and protests.

Embroidering in the public sphere as a routine that evolves over time produces a heterotopic sphere where social dynamics may be observed, and where everyday reality is amplified through the focus on small details. The presence of the duo in the public sphere does not constitute a detached anthropological gaze, but rather a call for participation and interference. They subtly infiltrate into the human relations in each locality and bring their impressions back into the art space, or at times show the result in the public sphere as well.

Embroidery as a form of documentation is a slow process, and as such it allows a layered reflection on a given sphere and of the social relations that shape it. Within the theoretical realm of participatory art, Documentary Embroidery are closest to Kester's approach. Conversation and dialogue are their main medium, and the durational performative process they undergo with the community take centre stage. Although the embroidery is the visible medium, this is merely a clever diversion, a tempting hook that invites participants to take part. Since embroidery is historically related to traditional communal practices in many cultures, it is nonthreatening, in the sense of not being

associated with elitist and difficult to understand avant-garde art. The communal and conversational sphere that it creates is what makes the work meaningful. As this discursive exchange is translated to symbols, texts and drawings which are being embroidered by both artists and participants, the audience can then view this aesthetic outcome and attempt to translate it back to what it meant for its creators. Through this act of translation, a kinship is created that crosses cultural barriers. Thus, it could fall within the definition of what Kester called dialogic art, as it redefines the aesthetic experience as durational rather than immediate; it is based on discursive exchange and negotiation; and is accessible without being simplistic.[13]

Daniel Landau's *Reside 1.4: Mount Zion, Darfur* (2012),[14] also makes use of documentary conventions, while undermining them through its means of display. Landau worked with asylum seekers from Darfur in South Tel Aviv, as part of a long-term project with immigrants and refugees in different places worldwide, and collected their stories and testimonies. This multilayered project, *Resident Alien*, which showed in the public sphere, theatre and art spaces, examined both the agency and the limitations of performative documentary actions in the context of testimony.

The installation featured in the exhibition showed video documentation of the faces of asylum seekers, who told personal stories about their journey to Israel and their life there. The faces were projected onto masks positioned above two empty chairs on which viewers were invited to sit. They would then wear a helmet equipped with loudspeakers, which transmitted the testimony in the

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[13] Ibid.

[14] Participants: Gumar Baker Tahe Din, Adam Muhamad, Adam Kamis, Adam Keler and Abdul Hamud Josef.

protagonist's voice. A third chair, positioned before the others, included the helmet with the sound, but not the mask with the projection. Instead, it included a camera pointed towards the person who would take their seat there. If an audience member chose to sit in this chair, his or her face would be filmed while they were listening to the testimony and projected next to the face of the asylum seeker speaking the testimony, on one of the back chairs. At the same time, the transcript of each testimony was projected separately onto a piece of wood lying on the floor, without sound. This could be read by audience members who opted to not participate by sitting on any of the chairs.

As the audience could watch both faces, the asylum seeker's and the interacting viewer's, a connection was forged between the one giving the testimony and the ones listening to it. This installation challenged conventions of distance between viewer and artwork, not merely by its invitation to enter the installation, but by creating several levels of participation: the audience, who could only read a silent testimony and regard others who participated; the listeners, whose faces were hidden while they heard an intimate account in the protagonists own voice; the participant who both listened and was documented in the act of listening; and the asylum seekers who told their stories. Thus, it complicated the dichotomy of viewer versus participant.[15]

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[15] I have dealt extensively with the subjects of trauma and testimony in two exhibitions that predated *The Infiltrators*: *Prolonged Exposure*, a group exhibition I curated at the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, in 2011, with artists Yael Brandt; the human rights organisation Breaking the Silence with Miki Kratsman and Avi Mograbi; Lana Cmajcanin; Juan Manuel Echavarria; Julia Meltzer and David Thorne; Avi Mograbi; Christoph Weber; Rona Yefman; Mich'ael Zupraner. (Publication available in Hebrew and English in print), and *Secondary Witness*, the winner of ISCP's curator award in 2012. Both focused on the role of the artist as a

The break between the voice and vision in this work gave rise to both estrangement and empathy. The interacting viewers put themselves in a 'risky' position as they turned into the subject of the gaze. For that they received a 'reward'—they were the only ones who heard the voice of the protagonist, whilst the noninteracting viewers could only read it. Thus, the voice received an elevated status over both language and sight, suggesting that to risk one's privileged position could entail a deeper or a more intimate form of listening. The other viewers inadvertently, by opting not to participate, embodied the objectification and discrimination that the protagonists experienced due to their geographic and cultural uprooting.

At the same time, the crossover of some viewers from the audience to the stage, infiltrating the invisible border between viewers and artwork, or between stage and audience, could be read not as an empathic brave act, but as a sort of ironic reenactment of the real border crossing of the protagonists. As the viewer was in most cases a white Israeli citizen, it enhanced the gap between the privileged viewer and the protagonists. As such, it is closer to the kind of antagonistic projects described by Bishop, which create discomfort among the bourgeois audience in order to make them aware of their complicity. However, this possible reading of the work was further complicated by the fact that in the opening, many of the viewers, interacting or not, were other asylum seekers and their families. In that sense, the opening became a performative event of

secondary witness via participatory methodologies, and on the problematics of the documentary gaze. It was only later, with *The Infiltrators* and *Preaching to the Choir*, where the telling of testimony became collective and partly embodied. In *(Un)Commoning* and *Voice Over*, the voice or its loss and practices of listening took centre stage.

enacted solidarity and identification, mixing the usual boundaries between the underprivileged community and the privileged viewers. I will return to the opening as the manifestation of the curatorial intention here via its significance for Ghana Think Tank's project.

Like Daniel Landau, the third group of artists, Ghana Think Tank (GTT), examine participatory art in a reflexive, critical manner, but their work delves further into the realm of antagonism. Ghana Think Tank are a group of American artists including Christopher Robbins, John Ewing, and Maria del Carmen Montoya. GTT was established in 2006 and has since founded an international network of think tanks in Ghana, Cuba, El Salvador, Serbia, Mexico, Ethiopia, and Gaza, which produce strategies for the solution of local problems in the 'developed' world as they call it. The initial idea of the founding artists was that think tanks in the so-called 'Third World' could offer solutions to 'First World' problems. They later discovered that this process could serve to create encounters between groups in conflict and to produce unexpected alliances. Shortly before the time of the exhibition, they had been working with groups of Mexican immigrants and American citizens who opposed immigration on the Mexico-US border. The two groups offered solutions to each other's problems. Based on this concept, I invited GTT to work with asylum seekers and South Tel Aviv residents.

During the process, think tanks composed of asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan offered solutions to the problems of Israelis from South Tel Aviv, and vice versa.

GTT explores the West's colonialist attitudes toward the 'Third World', and employs irony to examine their own role as Western artists. They attempt to infiltrate sets of existing stereotypes and overturn them by transforming the traditional division between those who help and those in need of assistance, consultants and those receiving counsel. Their work with different communities

strives to serve as a catalyst for real change and empowerment by raising problems and offering solutions, while also consciously and ironically exposing conflicts and antagonisms that arise through participatory art practices. Thus, it is a strange blend between a dialogic project, in accordance with Kester, based on a discursive process and with an activist aim, and an antagonistic approach in accordance with Bishop and Marchart, as it uses confusion and discomfort to expose prejudice and unbalanced power relations. However, although the provocative aspects of the project were aimed towards privileged Western audiences, they affected all the participants in ways that were not expected.

3.3 Curatorial Challenges With Conflictual Participation

In working with residents of South Tel Aviv and asylum seekers, two groups that often suffer from prejudice and discrimination, the project attempted to approach these problems from a perspective that is not often addressed in the media: rather than situating the two groups as enemies, it attempted to see whether they could stand on the same side of the divide, in opposition to their stereotypical perceptions by certain sectors of Israeli society. In other words—to use Chantal Mouffe's terminology—to turn them from antagonistic to agonistic,[16] or from enemies to adversaries. However, this proved difficult to accomplish.

The first challenge came from the familiar gap between the privileged artist and the underprivileged community. While the participating asylum seekers were, in most cases, happy to provide help and solutions even to those who

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[16] Mouffe, *Agonistics.*

sometimes torment them, the majority of South Tel Avivians involved, despite their good intentions when joining the project, found it difficult to overcome the suspicion towards the foreign artists who had come from America to offer solutions. Another challenge was that my role as a curator was mixed up with that of the artists, as they were not present in Israel for most of the process. For over a year, together with Yael Ravid who joined as a community relations person, we conducted a long field research that included multiple meetings with community leaders and activists from the Eritrean and Sudanese communities, as well as various South Tel Aviv resident groups such as community gardeners or feminist Mizrahi[17] poets. We learned about their initiatives and visited their venues while telling them about our project. We asked each person who they would recommend as the next person we meet, and so we slowly established trust before the GTT artists arrived. From those meetings, and with the help and advice of the community leaders who invited others, we established three think tanks: the Eritrean, the Sudanese, and the veteran South Tel Aviv residents' groups.

Following GTT's protocol and guided by them from afar, we collected 'problems' from residents by handing out postcards in the streets and shooting videos, and led ongoing meetings with the three think tanks to choose the problems they wished to address and offer solutions. In their methodology, GTT consider 'solutions' to be a mixture of social actions and intentions with

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[17] Mizrahi Jews are immigrants or descendants of immigrant Jews from North Africa and the Middle East. There are various historical and contemporary struggles around forms of marginalisation and discrimination experienced by Mizrahi Jews from the establishment of Israel as a country up until today. This experience is different to that of the Ashkenazi Jews who came mostly from North American or European countries.

aesthetic-artistic implementations. Christopher and John came to Tel Aviv twice, for the first meeting with the think tanks, and for the last stages of the project planning, creating and installing the artworks which aesthetically manifested the chosen 'solutions' to the problems. While the think tanks chose the problems and offered the solutions, GTT were the sole deciders regarding the artistic and aesthetic shape these solutions would take.

The fact that Yael and I were effectively GTT agents, following their protocol and enacting their methods, was born out of a budget limitation. This is a repeating issue with participatory projects—seldom does an art budget allow for international artists to establish significant long-term relations with a community that they are not part of—a problem which Grant Kester also addressed, as I mentioned before. With Yael and myself there, we could engage in the process as long as needed. We were still foreign to those communities, and perceived as privileged by them, but we could try to overcome the suspicion through a long-term process of trust-building conversations. However, this solution came with its own complications. As the curator, I'm usually not the one in direct contact with the communities involved in participatory artworks. I mediate between the artist and the institution or the audience, but usually not with the community, as the trust between an artist and a community needed for a participatory project is a crucial element in the process and can only be established through physical encounters. Additionally, as the ethical issues of working with a community are complex, particularly when antagonistic practices are involved, the question is who carries the ethical implications when an artist does not engage directly with the community. As I was both the curator of the project—the person in charge of communicating the project to the institution and to a wide audience—and the agent of an antagonistic collective, I wasn't sure at times how to communicate the project to both participants and audiences—how much to tell, what to expose, and

what should remain implied. This was further complicated by the fact that GTT's practice is somewhat curatorial, as they aim to trigger and initiate projects that could eventually gain a life of their own. The artists were also curators and the curator was also an artist. In fact, before the exhibition opened, GTT asked if I would like to be credited as a collaborating artist on their project. After some thought I decided that I didn't, and I told GTT that this entanglement is important to me as a part of my curatorial position, and not in separation from it.

Further complication was based on the diverse identities of the participants and the different communities they belonged to. The Eritrean and the Sudanese asylum seekers asked to form two different groups, based, as per their request, on their cultural differences and separate needs, and were formed by recommendation from the two communities' leaders. However, the Israeli residents' group was assembled from various contacts and directions; we had a much harder time putting it together, and the final group proved to be extremely heterogenic in its approaches and needs, and complex in its identity politics. To give an example, among the group of South Tel Aviv residents, there were Ashkenazi Jews and Mizrahi Jews. The later were mostly activists who perceive themselves to be an underprivileged minority with a history of racism, discrimination and struggles. They were suspicious of the way they would be portrayed in the work and in the documentation, fearing that they would be perceived as racist, while they in fact experience themselves as the victims of racism. They were calling the Ashkenazi members of the group, many of them new to the neighbourhood, rich and white gentrifiers. The only two think tank meetings that we managed to do with this group before it dispersed became sort of a twisted microcosmos of an identity politics battle, with conflicting moments that shifted from identification with the asylum seekers' fear of the police, to accusations about how these same asylum seekers make the neighbourhood unsafe.

The process with the asylum seeker think tanks had its own setbacks and complications: during the months before the exhibition's opening, thousands of asylum seekers were summoned to the 'open' detention centre in Holot, where they were kept indeterminately in an attempt to 'encourage' them to return to their countries of origin or to a third African country in a process termed 'consensual departure'. Thus, during the last stages of production we met some of our collaborators outside of the detention centre, which was in the middle of nowhere, in a desert area two and a half hours' car drive from Tel Aviv and one and a half hours from the nearest city. Without really planning it or fully understanding it at the time, the process of working with the Sudanese think tank became a form of struggle with the government's intention to seclude the asylum seekers and particularly their active community leaders, to prevent potential collaborations with Israeli activists and to silence their protests. Along with human rights organisations and alongside several other artistic-activist projects that happened in parallel, these visits became an intense form of participation for us in their lives and struggles, a sort of reverse infiltration of artistic practices beyond the borders marked by politicians.

Going back to our daily lives after each visit was a difficult and contradictory experience, as we learned of the harsh living conditions of our friends who remained in the detention centre.[18] Before the opening of the exhibition, we

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[18] The facility was supposedly open, but since the asylum seekers had to sign in three times a day it was impossible for them to realistically go anywhere. They were also not allowed to work and received a very small allowance and basic food They stayed in rooms with ten other people and often suffered from the cold as there was no adequate heating. Food was often spoiled or rotten, with no consideration for their cultural preferences and without proper health regulations. For any medical complaint, they were offered a painkiller. If they broke any rule, they were locked in a

asked the detention authorities for a special permit to allow the participants in the Sudanese think tank, who were residing in the detention centre, to be allowed to leave it for forty-eight hours and take part in the opening celebrations.[19] We didn't really believe they would be let out as there was no precedent for such an approval, and human rights organisations have been finding it hard to release people even for participating in court trials. We still tried, and I had an idea to use the paper with the logo of the family foundation which established and supported the art space—one of the richest and most powerful families in Israel. In order to play down the activist intent of the project so we didn't seem threatening, I wrote that the participants were involved in an artistic project which included drawing and was intended to help them deal with their trauma. Surprisingly, it worked. I still remember the surreal moment in which I called the main guard in the detention centre and he said: 'Oh, you are the art girl, ok sweety, send me the numbers of the inmates and I will give them a permit.' The group was released for twenty-four hours and participated in the opening. Later we went dancing, and it was the first time (and for some of them the last time) we got to hang out as friends. But even so, they went back to the

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closed prison nearby, and there were no clear regulations as to how long they could be kept there without trial. The threat of being locked up indefinitely was also used against those who refused to leave to a third country. Thousands of asylum seekers have eventually returned to Africa, after being offered money, documents and security by the Israeli government. However, there have been reports that many of them became refugees again, disappeared, or died.

[19] The opening was planned around a joint meal cooked by Sudanese and Eritrean chefs, part of the collective Kitchen Talks, an organisation which continues to be active today, and which Yael Ravid, the community representative of the project, established during our work process.

detention centre and we went back to our lives. It only reinforced how the opening was a bubble separated from real life—an almost utopic moment in which international and local artists met activists, asylum seekers, South Tel Aviv residents and audiences in an intimate performative setting, only to emphasise how barren the exhibition remained when this assembly of bodies, voices and minds left it.

Attempting to get out of this art versus life dichotomy and to increase the meeting points between asylum seekers and Israelis, and between art world and activist world, I invited some of the Eritrean think tank participants to be paid guides throughout the exhibition, to explain the artworks not from an artistic or curatorial point of view, but from their own perspective—what these works meant to them in relation to their own lives and experiences. They also reflected on the process, at times critically, but mostly simply shared their stories. This, in a way, continued the direction set by GTT of creating alternative and reverse knowledge transfer between the asylum seekers to the artists, curators and audiences, thus fracturing the predominant hierarchy of the 'genius' artist helping the community to see the light, or the enlightened Westerner teaching the non-Western refugees how to assimilate into a new culture. Here, the aim was to open new forms of listening through art and beyond and to use art to discuss cultural differences and acute misunderstandings, born from a policy of deliberate separation meant to not allow the asylum seekers to feel at home. This was important, but still, when the exhibition was viewed as mere objects, without the presence of the guides, it returned to its ambivalent problematics. I will come back to this issue after a short diversion in order to discuss the fourth piece in the exhibition.

3.4 Schlingensief's Container: Inviting Antagonisms in the Public Realm

The last work in the exhibition, and the most antagonistic, was *Ausländer Raus! Schlingensief's Container* (2002), a documentary by director Paul Poet. It was important for me to show this work in the frame of this exhibition as it documented one of the most prominent antagonistic participatory projects: *Please Love Austria*, by artist Christoph Schlingensief (2001), and particularly as it responded to a situation involving asylum seekers which was not much different than the one in Israel. At the time, the populist far-right Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) was getting stronger in Austria, and its xenophobic propaganda becoming more popular, whilst at the same time a detention centre for asylum seekers was being set up on the outskirts of Vienna. For *Please Love Austria*, Schlingensief set up a container inhabited by a group of asylum seekers in Vienna's central State Opera square. The audience were told that the asylum seekers had been brought there from the actual detention centre, and when deported from the container, they would be returned to it. The public was asked to vote daily, through a web TV channel, on which asylum seeker would be banished from the container. Every night, the two most unpopular asylum seekers were led in a sort of walk of shame to a car, which supposedly took them back to the centre. The winner was to receive a cash prize and to marry an Austrian. Schlingensief hosted the 'show', playing himself as a sort of mad circus director, inviting the audience to peek into the container through designated holes, calling on right-wing politicians to interfere, and yelling confusing remarks on whether the project was 'real' or art.

Going back to the previous discussion regarding the ethics of antagonistic participatory works, Schlingensief's work is usually recognised as antagonistic and associated with artists such as Santiago Sierra. Together they are a target for critics, as we have seen previously, who read all their works as simplistically abusive. However, there are two main characteristics that differentiate the two

artists, making Schlingensief's work more layered in its aesthetic characteristics, its ethical imperative, and its political potency. The first is that this work was conducted in a public square and not in an artistic institution, and involved the media, thus entangling the art project with the 'real' world. Thus, I believe that the involvement of a public sphere, both literally—the public square—and via the use of mass media, was crucial to the work's impact (I will return to the significance of the public sphere in the next chapters). The second is that the artist shared his critical and ironic intentions with the participating asylum seekers, while leaving the misunderstandings, shock and anger to the crowd of viewers in the square and online, and to the FPO representatives.

This information was disclosed to me by Paul Poet, who was a close collaborator of Schlingensief's during the making of the work. Poet said that the asylum seekers were indeed genuine asylum seekers, but they were also actors, and they were not sent to the detention centre when 'deported'. While Schlingensief has deliberately kept this to himself to maintain the confusion regarding his intentions, Poet hinted at this throughout his film, for example with scenes of the asylum seekers having fun in the container as if mocking the selection process. The film, manifesting the documentation of a live performance, cannot be separated from the original work, as a retrospective reading that adds layers of understanding and introduces it to new audiences. However, in most of Sierra's projects, the participants—also belonging to nonprivileged and often abused sectors of society—seem to be passive labourers in a predetermined concept that causes them further distress; At least, we have no hint from the artist that this is otherwise. Watching them would most likely arouse a one-dimensional experience of discomfort and frustration in most viewers, as opposed to the mixed feelings Schlingensief's project invited.

Even Miller admits, in his critique of antagonistic practices, that not all antagonisms are alike: 'It cannot be the antagonistic gesture per se that counts as an aesthetic virtue—it matters what kind of antagonism it entails. The ethical bears on the aesthetic evaluation of the work.'[20] However, Miller blames Schlingensief's project for establishing aesthetic autonomy as a means of being released from ethical concerns:

> Those of us who, like Schlingensief, possess a keen critical acumen are clued in to the real political critique encoded in the act of aesthetic mimesis. With a knowing wink we are invited to read the progressive counter-message in the populist sloganeering spouted from the artist's megaphone. To everyone else, however, the work reads as racist demagoguery run amok.[21]

Unlike Miller, I believe that this efficient confusion technique, which made some viewers at the time unsure of the artist's intentions, is exactly why this work was so strong in creating a wide public debate. The potency of *Please Love Austria* comes precisely from this deliberate confusion between the real political sphere and the 'fake' artistic one. Miller's separation of those who are in the know from those who aren't, is a classic art world elitist move. I disagree that most of the crowd in the square thought that they were watching a mere demonstration of racist demagogy. In fact, as the film shows, some of the crowd treated this as amusing, others as very disturbing, and yet others as affirming their own positions. Even those who didn't understand that they were watching a theatre production—the passersby whose daily routines were interrupted by

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[20] Miller, Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond, 177.

[21] Ibid, 179.

a mysterious performative intervention—have most likely learned, subsequently, that this was a critical stunt, aimed to protest the real asylum seekers' camp. Interestingly, some of those who found the spectacle disturbing were Austrian nationalists who feared that it made Austria look bad (particularly coming from a German artist), as well as left-wing activists who almost literally brought down the house when they attempted to 'free the refugees' and remove the *Auslander Raus* (Foreigners Out) banner. While everyone was playing their predictable roles in this political theatre, they were pushed outside of their comfort zones, confronted with the absurdities of a reality that they were perhaps otherwise indifferent or blind to.

In this sense, the work relates not only to Bishop's call for a shocking provocation, but also to Marchart's suggestion of minoritarian propaganda to wake people up from their political slumber. In line with Marchart's definitions of what can stand as a conflictual aesthetic, as specified before, the project was organised by a group of people,[22] incited a conflict in a public space and interrupted people's everyday routine. The debates in the newspapers and TV, which the work deliberately encouraged in real time, added to the understanding that the real targets of the 'abuse' were the FPO representatives, who didn't understand that the joke was on them, and continued to take part in the performative trap set by the artist, who wanted to point a twisted propagandic mirror towards the tactics of the far-right politicians.

Thus, we return to the question of who is in the know, as one of the markers for differentiating the ethical aspects of a participatory work; since the asylum

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[22] Albeit with a hierarchical separation between the authorship of the artist and the labour of everyone else involved, which is why I call it a participatory rather than a collective or collaborative project.

seekers were collaborating and aware of the artists' concept and aims, there was no intention for abuse to be inflicted upon them. Although one could claim that as an underprivileged group the asylum seekers were pressured to agree to the artist's terms, it seems that they had the agency and the understanding to make their own decisions. An aspect that strengthens this assumption is the fact that the asylum seekers were professional actors, as well as their involvement in the content making (for example through a puppet show they put together). The fact that they were pretending to be jailed and deported already creates a different set of ethics, as both sides agreed to act within this artistic realm. However, as I've shown with the work of GTT for *The Infiltrators*, even when the participants are in the know, collaborating and aware of the layered artistic intentions, the affinities between the difficulties of their real lives and their accentuated representation already mark a hierarchy that is inherent to the work—between the privileges of the artist and the audience, and the lack of privilege of the participants. In the cases both of Schlingensief and of GTT, this hierarchy is deliberate and meant to make the privileged feel uncomfortable, but through different tactics. Schlingensief enhances the violence and abuse by duplicating the real hierarchies in controlled and supposedly safe artistic conditions, while GTT turns the hierarchies on their head by asking the underprivileged to help the privileged.

As aforesaid, all the projects shown in *The Infiltrators* examined participatory art in a reflexive, critical manner by creating different levels of participation, and by addressing diverse groups of participants. *Ausländer Raus! Schlingensief's Container*'s participatory scope encompassed various groups: the asylum seekers in the container, the audience that experienced the events in real time, the eight-hundred thousand who watched and voted online, and the viewers who reflected on the project in retrospect through the documentary. The beginning of the twenty-first century was marked by the appearance of reality

TV shows and online sharing platforms, which has since expanded significantly; this project managed, in an almost prophetic manner, to reflect the dystopic potential of such participatory formats. It exposed their cynicism, and how these formats might incite violence and enhance unequal power relations, whilst claiming to embody democracy. Thus, this work also underscores the fragile and elusive status of participation, and the ease with which it may be coopted by various agents.

From today's perspective, one should wonder how a crowd would respond to such a work in a climate of political correctness. My guess is that the work would not have been approved by a major theatre festival today or would have been censured due to the outrage of someone whose feelings were hurt. In Israel recently, as I have specified in the introduction, many art works have been consored supposedly for being provocative and hurting the audience's feelings, but in fact because they have expressed a critical, nonconsensual political stance. In this climate, I long for works such as Schlingensief's container and the layered controversy and debate that they have raised.

Claire Bishop's summary regarding the work's critical or activist efficiency is relevant for all the projects in *The Infiltrators*:

> A frequently heard criticism of this work is that it did not change anyone's opinion: the right-wing pensioner is still right-wing, the lefty protestors are still lefty, and so on. But this instrumentalized approach to critical judgment misunderstands the artistic force of Schlingensief's intervention. The point is not about 'conversion,' for this reduces the work of art to a question of propaganda. Rather, Schlingensief's project draws attention to the contradictions of political discourse in Austria at that moment. The shocking fact is that Schlingensief's container caused more public agitation and distress than the presence of a real deportation center a few miles outside Vienna. The disturbing lesson of

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Please Love Austria is that an artistic representation of detention has more power to attract dissensus than an actual institution of detention. In fact, Schlingensief's model of 'undemocratic' behavior corresponds precisely to 'democracy' as practiced in reality. This contradiction is the core of Schlingensief's artistic efficacy—and it is the reason why political conversion is not the primary goal of art, why artistic representations continue to have a potency that can be harnessed to disruptive ends, and why Please Love Austria is not (and should never be seen as) morally exemplary.[23]

3.5 *The Infiltrators* Exhibition: Reception and Criticism

Bishop exemplified the slippery tension between willing collaboration and cohered participation in the text which was later part of *The Infiltrators* catalogue:

> The artist relies upon the participants' creative exploitation of the situation that he/she offers, just as participants require the artist's cue and direction. This relationship is a continual play of mutual tension, recognition, and dependency— more akin to the collectively negotiated dynamic of stand-up comedy, or to BDSM sex, than to a ladder of progressively more virtuous political forms.[24]

Interestingly, Bishop describes the role of an antagonistic artist in a way that could easily be borrowed for curatorial practices. Could an antagonistic participatory curatorial practice be creating an infrastructure which allows the

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[23] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 282–283.

[24] Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle'.

participating artists to creatively exploit the situation? And if antagonistic practices are like collectively negotiated BDSM, should there be a safe word in case someone feels too uncomfortable?

For me, *The Infiltrators* included the unintended enabling of a conflict, as Marchart described political curating. I couldn't predict all the different manifestations of this conflict, and the difficult moments that were involved for all participants and for myself. However, I hoped that the inherent conflictuality of the works would open up paths of critical reflexivity for both participants and visitors to the exhibition.

Looking back on the installation in the Artport Gallery, Documentary Embroidery, Daniel Landau and GTT all created an aesthetic manifestation that went beyond mere documentation of their participatory projects. This was an art exhibition, made from images and sounds, but it also manifested an attempt to bridge the gap between those who participated in the works and those who experienced it in an art space, and to invite solidarity and empathy in a complex sociopolitical situation. This was not a naive attempt at claiming that all discursive and participatory projects can resolve social conflicts (what Kester has called dialogical determinism).[25] It was rather a reflexive experiment asking whether an aesthetic manifestation of participation, with various levels of antagonism, could invite empathy. But I believe that while this was partly

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[25] Kester has warned against dialogic determinism, a naive perception of dialogue as a solution to social issues. This problem is particularly relevant, claimed Kester, when the artist is foreign to the community and its agenda. Kester called for dialogic projects to be aware of inherent preconditioned power relations between artist, community and audience, especially when class and race-based struggles are involved. Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 162.

successful among the immediate participants in the projects, the experience and reception of the exhibition was the main cause of misunderstandings and criticism.

The installation attempted to follow the processes undertaken by means of documentation, via films, sculptural and graphic representations, and a series of workshops and tours. At the same time, it could be seen as an ironic take on community-based aesthetics, appearing to be both direct and subvert, appealing and antagonising, accessible and complex, all at the same time. However, this hasn't been understood as such by all viewers, who insisted on reading the exhibition through the prism of activist efficiency or didactic moralism. I would like to address what I see as misguided critique here through deconstructing the response of two art critics; for me this is important not just in relation to this case study, but since similar criticism is often heard towards participatory and political projects, in Israel and beyond. I would like to unfold the common blind spots in this type of critique while examining what lessons I can learn from it.

Galya Yahav, in her art critique column for *Haaretz* newspaper, wrote a cynical and angry report of the exhibition. She claimed that at first glance the exhibition looked like a parody of didactic exhibitions and political correctness, but was in fact a preachy social exhibition aimed to raise awareness, create a dialogue and accept the other. She was not able to grasp that irony could also be a reflexive way to raise awareness and encourage dialogue, and not just a tool for mocking social practice, or that dialogic processes are not inherently didactic or naive. She also claimed that the aesthetic or artistic result of the participatory process shown in the exhibition looks like a 'childish presentation, with a transparent propagandic effect, that doesn't even tingle the horrors that

refugees in Israel go through. This is why it is outrageous. It is not a political scream but a community centre class activity.'[26]

To explain her point, Yahav complimented Paul Poet's film, but then attacked Ghana Think Tank's installation, which included videos, stickers with quotes from the think tank's meetings, postcards with problems and sculptural elements. She quoted one of the stickers that said: 'People think that Israelis hate refugees. But this is not the situation. Israelis love their Jewish country so much, that they are afraid to lose it. So it's a matter of love—not hate.' Yahav claimed that this quote shows that the exhibition allows racism and nationalistic cliches. However, Yahav failed to mention that this was a quote by the Eritrean think tank, as was stated clearly next to it. Thus, it is an attempt on their side to understand the cruelty inflicted upon them by the Israeli state (and at times by Israeli people). It is a testimony to the strength and kindness of a group of people who try to see a dark situation from an empathic angle. Of course, this is very uncomfortable to an Israeli reader, particularly to a left-wing art critic, and is meant to invite frustration. However, to claim that it is racist, when said by the very group upon which this racism is inflicted, is a misunderstanding of the entire process.

The critic goes on to cynically target the whole concept of problem solving, and the various artistic manifestations of the suggested solutions in the exhibition (for example an all-female community guard dressed in African uniform, or a

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[26] Galia Yahav, 'What is the Chance that Gedeon Sa'ar will Come to His Senses Following the Exhibition the Infiltrators?', *Haaretz*, (June 17 2014) https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/art/artreview/2014-06-17/ty-article/.premium/0000017f-db6a-d3a5-af7f-fbeed0700000 Accessed 16 October, 2023. Quotes translated from Hebrew by Maayan Sheleff.

pictogram guide to cultural misunderstandings), saying that this will not bring solutions to the real problems. If these artists care about the goal so much, she asks, why not do a campaign and donate the money to the cause? She claims that the chance that politicians will change their minds because of the 'culture shock' the exhibition will cause them is thin.

However, the critic fails again to understand the inherent irony and reflexivity in GTT's concept of 'problem solving' through art. She instead makes exactly the most common claims about participatory projects, as both Kester and Bishop have laid out, in which critics question the work's status as art (or in Yahav's case, call it community aesthetics as a derogatory term), and relatedly question its political efficacy. Kester calls us instead 'to understand these works as a specific form of art practice with its own characteristics and effects, related to, but also different from, other forms of art and other forms of activism as well.'[27] He suggests that the main difficulty for developing criteria for evaluating these works is the lack of resources in modern art history to examine projects that are organised around a collaborative rather than a specular relationship.

Another critic, the acclaimed curator and theoretician Dr. Gideon Ofrat, wrote about the exhibition in his blog.[28] To be fair, he began his critique by declaring himself inherently sceptical towards social or participatory practices, from both an artistic and an activist perspective. He admitted that he is captive to the

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[27] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 11.

[28] Gideon Ofrat, 'Art- Out, Community- In?', *Gideon Ofrat's Storage* (14 July, 2014)

https://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/2014/07/04/%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%AA-out-%D7%A7%D7%94%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%94-in/

Accessed 16 October 2022.

traditional concept of art, object making, whether material or conceptual: art as an object that encompasses a personal expression and a complex spiritual ideal. From that perspective, he finds himself frustrated and bored when examining participatory art, which he sees as expressing disgust towards the art world (meaning as a form of institutional critique) rather than as attempting to develop its own language. Ofrat's blog piece then addressed the history of participatory art, mentioned the happenings and compared them to the performative guided tour *Survival*, led by Nadim Omar, a Sudanese asylum seeker and actor, who leads a tour of Neve Sha'anan neighbourhood with the participation of the neighbourhood residents. Ofrat failed to mention, or perhaps wasn't aware, that this tour was developed in the frame of *The Infiltrators*, as part of the 'solutions' offered by the Sudanese think tank (together with Nisan Almog as a dramaturge and myself). In fact, this is the only project that continued for some time after the exhibition ended, led and organised by neighbourhood residents who created an independent financial structure to receive payment for their labour.[29]

A common problem with participatory projects is that they don't continue after the exhibition is over, when the organising force behind the project leaves and the funding ends, and that was sadly true of most of the projects in this exhibition, except for the guided tour. Not only did the tour continue, but it also seemed to have impacted some of the perspectives of the participants. Nadim, the tour guide, said that he himself had several revelatory moments, born from

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[29] During the exhibition all the participants in the think tank and related projects received a fee for their participation, as in all of GTT's projects, accept for most of the Sudanese group members who continuously refused to take the fee despite our efforts.

this flip of power between the one who guides and the ones who are guided, related to GTT's concept of reverse knowledge transfer. Some of the moments were heart wrenching, such as when Nadim was told by other asylum seekers in the street not to collaborate with Israelis as they are the enemy, or when he was scolded by a sex worker who started to cry after asking for money and being ignored by the touring group. There were also hopeful moments, for example with one of the veteran residents who was initially part of the South Tel Aviv think tank and often protested publicly against the asylum seekers' presence in the neighbourhood. She wanted to host the tour groups in her home to show them the filth and noise coming from the central bus station. After several tours in which she completely ignored Nadim's presence and accused the asylum seekers of causing some of the neighbourhood's problems, she gradually started addressing him directly and eventually even fondly. On the last tour I took part in, he told her that she was like a grandmother to him, and she suggested that they could 'work something out together' to make things better.

Returning to the art critique, Ofrat claimed that there was no synthesis between the ethical and the aesthetic in *The Infiltrators*, or that ethics devoured the aesthetic. Interestingly, unlike Yahav, he thought that the exhibition's aesthetics were traditional postconceptual installation aesthetics; however he unfortunately meant it as an insult. Even though the exhibition 'looked like' art, he wrote, the works didn't elevate beyond a mere document on the status of asylum seekers. His intention here was to address the exhibition's failure to bridge the gap between a 'traditional' artistic curatorial approach and the character of the works themselves, which he cannot read within his interpretive framework. At the same time, he blamed the exhibition for not being effective socially, claiming that the location was hard to reach and the work addressed a liberal audience that was already convinced. He claimed further that the

works should have left the gallery space and 'infiltrated' a public sphere in which their effect would have been stronger. But the odd thing is that they did infiltrate public spheres—Schlingensief's project was in a public square in Vienna, Documentary Embroidery was in Levinsky Garden, Daniel Landaus' work was shown outside in Neve Sha'anan before it was shown in the gallery, and GTT made multiple engagements in the public sphere, including the guided tour.

Should we deduce from this that a documentation of a participatory process will always fail in showing to a nonparticipating audience the complexity of the process, or that there was a specific failure in the manner of representation and mediation in this exhibition? Or perhaps, that those who master the language of avant-garde art find it more difficult to embrace the breaches in its hegemony? Either way, there is an inherent contradiction in Efrat's artistic criticism—on one hand he would like participatory projects to look more like the art he knows and appreciates, as objects in a gallery with a certain aesthetic quality, and on the other hand he wants these projects to have political impact which he can measure by stepping out into the public sphere.

Both Yahav and Ofrat could not have helped but judge the exhibition in terms of either effective political change or artistic epiphany ('cultural shock' in Yahav's words)—either a pure activist approach or an art for art's sake stance––neither of which were relevant to the exhibition's layered intent. In opposition to their claims, both the exhibition itself, and GTT specifically, did try to develop a new language relevant to the sharing of collaborative and participatory processes. Whether this language failed or succeeded in communicating to a varied audience is a harder question to answer without elaborate methods of collecting testimonies and measuring impacts; as I explained in the introduction, despite the attention given here to various approaches to

participatory art critique, it is difficult, and perhaps wrong, to measure participatory art in terms of success and failure, or good art and bad art.

GTT's entire concept and methodology are based on exactly this gap—between the expectations of the art world and of artistic discourse, developed and cultivated mostly in the Western world, and the complexity of the lives, experiences and knowledge of the non-Western world. By asking the three think tanks—the Israeli, the Eritrean and the Sudanese—to identify with each other's problems and offer solutions, GTT already marks the gap between the problems of the asylum seekers and what the Israelis experience as problems, as real as they are to them. They point attention towards the participants' ability to listen within the frame of an ephemeral performative, collaborative process, rather than to the resulting objects.

I think that the problematics in the reading of GTT's work come from the work's complicated location between the dialogic, the antagonistic, and the propagandic. Each one of the theoreticians I focused on in the previous chapter could have written about this work from a different point of view: Kester could have mentioned the discursive exchange in which the participants were asked to step out of their usual identity positions; Bishop could have claimed that the same process—asking refugees to solve the problems of a country that doesn't allow them refuge—is antagonistic, and that the artistic result is deliberately confusing; Marchart might have said that this is an example of conflictual aesthetics, an organised collaborative process which included performative interruptions in the public sphere, disguised as propaganda.

In addition, a particular problematic existed in the translation of GTT's concept to the complex Israeli sociopolitical reality. In previous GTT projects, the line could be easily drawn between, for example, the mundane problems of a small town in Scotland, and those of the harsh lives of incarcerated Indian girls; thus, the ironic flip in knowledge transfer is more readily understood. Even with

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GTT's double-sided problem-solving project with asylum seekers and citizen brigades on the Mexican border,[30] most (art) audiences would easily make a decision as to who is 'good' and who is 'bad' here. However, in Israel the juxtaposition of asylum seekers 'versus' south Tel Aviv residents is more complex, as both groups are marginalised and suffer various forms of violence and discrimination. While I had thought that the commonalities between them could lead to solidarities, the gaps proved too wide to cross.

It is indeed very difficult, almost impossible, to manifest the intimate, complex experiences that the participants went through in an exhibition or documentation.

In that sense I agree with the criticism regarding the difficulties inherent in any documentation of a live performative process, let alone a participatory one. I also agree that an art space has limited capacity for activist impact, as it only 'preaches to the choir', addressing a small, already convinced audience. One approach to addressing this problem would be to only manifest these kinds of projects in the form of continual participatory performances in the public sphere, such as the guided tour. This approach, for example, was taken by another group of artists and activists, Holot Theatre, who were working in parallel with the asylum seekers in Holot detention centre. Their project was a participatory theatre production in which asylum seekers and Israeli actors switched roles, and they involved the audience in presenting various scenes, inspired by Legislative Theatre and the methods of Theatre of the Oppressed.[31]

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[30] GTT, 'Mexican Border' http:/www.ghanathinktank.org/current-projects-2/2015/10/2/Mexican-border Accessed 15 October, 2022.

[31] Holot Legislative Theatre, '"No Human Being is Illegal": Polarized Theatre of the Oppressed with Asylum Seekers and Israeli Citizens', University of Minnesota

Another potential solution to some of these problems is to document the process in a format that enables wider dissemination. This approach was taken by film director Avi Mograbi, who documented the rehearsals of Holot Theatre as well as the daily lives and protests of the asylum seekers, and made these into a feature film.[32] The film also reflexively accentuated the complex relationships between the Israeli artist-activists and the asylum seekers.[33]

However, from the perspective of an independent curator, when it comes to art spaces and art funding, in most cases a permanent installation is expected. At the same time, the hybrid of art-activism-education seems to scare off many nonartistic funding organisations, as art's insistence on complexity, nuances, and contradictions doesn't neatly fit into their criteria. My approach is that an exhibition of participatory projects seen through a documentary lens, like the one presented in *The Infiltrators*, can be a meaningful and complementary way of discussing these projects, in addition to formats such as theatres, live assemblies and films. Through their reflexive examination as an art form, including their blind spots and failures, various levels of understanding may arise—some didactic, others emotional, including anger and frustration.

Institute for Advanced Study, (22 February, 2019) https://ias.umn.edu/tags/holot-legislative-theatre Accessed 4 October, 2022.

[32] *In Between Fences* (2016), available for viewing on the director's website: https://www.avimograbi.org/between-fences The film, which didn't make it into theatres in Israel due to its political nature, opened to viewers online and was screened in festivals abroad.

[33] This is similar to the approach taken by Paul Poet, or for example by director Mike Figgis who made the documentary *Battle of Orgreave* (2001) after Jeremy Deller's performative reenactment of a historical demonstration.

Participatory art's insistence on sustaining contradictions, without neatly fitting into any category, could potentially invite a more intent listening, but perhaps not from everyone. By that, I don't mean that only those who are well acquainted with art language can understand (obviously, as we saw, this is not the case), or that those who are not art savvy will learn something new thanks to art. What I mean is that if these projects succeed in creating a temporary community of curators-artists-participants-audience in the exhibition space, as well as outside of it, a community in the sense of an assembly of bodies (and objects) that create a sort of transitional energy, then there is a justification to the presence of the art space. Both formats—a physical ephemeral participatory assembly, and an exhibition of various elements from it—should work side by side, repeatedly, to enable these possible practices to resonate with a wider audience. This then may be transformative and potentially lead to further collaborations and new solidarities. If the viewers get angry because they feel excluded from some aspects of the process, or don't understand it fully, perhaps in the next project they would want to take part in the process, or even initiate a similar project of their own. However, irony is a potent weapon, and should be used carefully, so it doesn't turn into cynicism and cause only alienation, without reaching the next stage where empathy can grow.

In order to have a sense of how it might have felt to participate in the work, I asked Nor, one of the participants in the Sudanese think tank, who became my friend, to tell me in retrospect what he thought about the process. Nor is currently writing a book about his life, after taking a writing course. This a part of what he wrote about his experience:[34]

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[34] I include this in his own words (he wrote in English), slightly shortened and edited in terms of grammar.

Working with Ghana Think Tank, exchanging issues with a variety of people, youth and adults from so many different places, had made me realize that there was so much mislead information between communities, as we live in such a complex social media world where everyone has a voice. However, that platform is often being used to spread negativity rather than positivity. I realized that a platform like Ghana Think Tank was a great opportunity to seek positivity, by exchanging our realities as they are, rather than seeking misleading reality from social media. I felt so strong about the positivity and opportunity that the project would bring.

I remember reviewing the questions and opinions that were sent from Holland.[35] While most of the problems we received were related to depression, loneliness, or family's problems, there was one particular statement that caught my attention. It said: 'who are these people whom are running away from their homes and can't solve their own problems to advise me how to deal with my problems?' I recall laughing to myself. We as refugees might not be good at many things, but when it comes to dealing with depression, loneliness or family's issues, we know very well how to manage.

When I think about this statement two things come to mind: either we failed to understand that different societies have similar problems, or we

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[35] This is from a second phase of the project, which I was no longer involved in. Yael continued to work with GTT and with the Sudanese and Eritrean Think Tank, in another project which involved collecting problems from a community in Holland and contacting think tanks that they had previously worked with for answers. GTT often return to think tanks they have previously worked with.

have been fed with misleading information and could not see further than that. Most developed nations at some point in history went through wars and conflicts that now some nations are facing, including mine.

In the project with Ghana Think Tank, there wasn't enough space to share a full experience of being a refugee. From my own experiences of being one for almost eighteen years, going through several countries, many people whom I met in person think that becoming a refugee is a free choice. However, it's more of a choice of choosing survival over death or persecution; in other words, one would be forced to become a refugee. It means being in places that constantly remind you that you are not welcome, and yet you have to remain. Nevertheless, one carries scares, loss, homesickness and longing for a family and friends, where one feels human. So in order to explain myself fully, I would need a larger platform, and as for the audience to understand my journey, they must know how it started. However, it's my strong wish that there will be many platforms like Ghana Think Tank, which give an opportunity to the positive voices to rise.

What struck me the most from Nor's response is that what he mentioned as the lacuna in the project—the lack of room to tell his full story—has led him to find his own solution and write a book about his life, in his own words. In addition, he saw the antagonistic aspect of the project—the frustrating absurdity of people with first world problems who don't understand what it means to be a refugee—as a motivation to continue to find ways to amplify what he called positive voices.

3.6 Conclusion and After Effects

To conclude, *The Infiltrators* attempted to examine participatory art's forms of representation and display as well as its limitations, while probing the relations between artist, community, and audience. It brought to the surface issues of authorship and power relations, raising questions regarding the artistic and aesthetic representation of community-based processes. It allowed various conflicts to evolve and encouraged a public debate.

The Infiltrators did have a concrete activist aim, not in assuming that it would bring actual, swift, measurable political change (although this would have been welcomed), but in aiming to raise awareness of the condition of African asylum seekers in Israel. The exhibition allowed many people to meet and speak with the asylum seekers for the first time. Some of the alliances between asylum seekers, activists and artists, created during the work process, continue today. Many artistic, cultural and educational projects with the asylum seekers happened in parallel to the exhibition. Two of them I have mentioned before— Holot Theatre and the film *In Between Fences*—and I should also mention the Levinsky Garden Library[36] and its long-term educational initiatives. Various projects were developed in the following years by asylum seekers and Israelis who either participated in the exhibition or viewed it, including Kitchen Talks,[37] culinary workshops with asylum seeker chefs, led by Yael Ravid, the community representative in the project; photography courses and exhibitions with asylum seeker artists; a documentary made by two asylum seekers who were part of the Sudanese think tank and others.

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[36] https://en.thegardenlibrary.com/ Accessed 12 May, 202

[37] https://www.kitchentalks.co.il/?lang=en Accessed 12 May 2022

Politically, the process of change was slow and complex, and to date the situation is still precarious.[38] All the legal developments towards improvements in the status of asylum seekers were due to the brave and consistent long-term struggles of the asylum seekers and the human rights activists. In that sense, artistic practices are a drop in the pool of ideas, actions and struggles, but still, perhaps, a meaningful drop for those who have been touched by them.

In a world in which identity positions are increasingly extremised and provocations are the most common tool for getting messages across, a nuanced and complex approach is difficult to communicate. Myself writing about this project in retrospect is an attempt to render this scale of greys in a world of black or white. Despite the logistic setbacks, the ethical complications, and the constant doubts from amongst both art and activism communities, I believe that participatory art processes are a meaningful activist tool, as well as a fascinating and important form of contemporary art. They could offer a sort of lingering on the borders that make up our realties and restrict our visions: between art and activism and education, between a grim reality and a vision of a new future, between one territory and the next, between one person and another. The development of more concrete models of these practices in

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[38] At a certain point the Sudanese asylum seekers were released from the detention centre after a ruling that limited the time in the detention facility, and eventually the centre was shut down. Another regulation that did not allow them to return to Tel Aviv, where most of them lived and worked, was eventually cancelled. A more significant development happened in December 2021, when the highest court of law forced the Israeli government to give temporary visas to refugees coming from Darfur and the Blue Nile, where most of the Sudanese think tank members came from. However, every government flips the decisions of its predecessor, and we've had many in different shades of right wing.

multiple locations could create affiliations between various communities who may experience similar difficulties. Within this wider network of solidarity and awareness, the lingering could become an infiltration that will help in undermining these borders. Throughout this thesis I will continue to probe the artworks and curatorial projects I was involved in, asking if and how they manifest participatory curating, looking for the transformative moments between the dialogic and the antagonistic.

3.7 Prelude

In an article he wrote in relation to the exhibition *Scar* I curated in 2006, the sociologist professor Moshe Zuckerman offered this exhibition as a paradigmatic case for the relations of Israeli society and the art that is created within it.[39] Zuckerman responded to Smadar Sheffi, *Haaretz* art critic at the time, who wrote a critique of the exhibition. [40]Both Sheffi and Zuckerman quoted my text for the exhibition's publication, in which I addressed the curatorial attempt to include personal testimonies of neighbourhood residents alongside the artworks, hung on the gallery walls and in the catalogue. I wrote:

> While working on the exhibition it was hard to escape the feeling of distress caused by the Sisyphean attempt to combine the two worlds, the one of art and the one of sociopolitical struggles…the curatorial act of combining the two felt somewhat like placing a band aid, an artificial

[39] Moshe Zuckerman, 'Art and Israeli Society', *Mifne Journal*, (December 2007), 29-32.

[40] Smadar Sheffi, 'Art Pales in Comparison with Reality', *Haaretz (November 16 2007).*

healing attempt. Thus, the exhibition in Line 16 Gallery, a community art space that aims to connect the artistic and social worlds, speaks on the gap between art and community as a wound which cannot heal.

In the spirit of the predictable critique of political art, which I elaborated before in relation to *The Infiltrators*, Sheffi wrote that art should not be a social tool but a reflective sphere with no practical role. After examining the works via the 'artistic art critique tools that she masters', as Zuckerman described it, she claimed that the personal stories made the art works pale in comparison. But Zuckerman claimed instead that the art should pale in comparison to the atrocities of reality; that in order to be a reflective space with no role, art already has a role, which is to be an alternative to efficient reality, which is oppressive precisely because of its instrumentality. Thus, he claims that the works in the exhibition must have remained a Sisyphean attempt to combine the two worlds, as the very competition between the texts and the artworks is what made the artworks pale, not their lack of quality in terms of inner artistic standards. While the texts are also only representations of reality, their symbolic level is different to that of the artworks, in terms of their distance from the suffering that they describe. They're much more concretely documentary, while art, even if it is documentary, deliberately separates itself from the individual case to reach the universal.

Specifically in regard to Israeli society, Zuckerman wrote that it is so violent, oppressive and ideologically blind, that any art that attempts to take part in a sociopolitical struggle would become inherently pale. The multiple sources of

tensions and conflicts[41] have made Israeli society wounded, scared and divided, in such a way that the only thing that makes it feel supposedly united is an outside threat.[42] In this context, the question is whether it is at all possible to produce artistic representation that encompasses this heterogeneity and takes into account that the reception of art will also be subject to different hierarchies of relevance and understanding. As a solution he offers to dilute the expectations of art; enable its helplessness, its paleness; allow it to refuse spectacular effects or to fight for its visibility. To let it be miserable as an authentic testimony to barbaric reality; to let it be silent in the face of reality or in the face of commercial art forms that take pleasure in themselves; to let it be like a message in a bottle that at least does not betray its subjects.

While this text was written in 2007, and in relation to an exhibition that predated this thesis, I feel that it is relevant to most of the projects that I have curated. From today's perspective, when reality seems to become more violent and societies in Israel and beyond increasingly divided, it is even more acute. While I don't fully concur with Zuckerman's pessimistic conclusion, I identify with his call to not expect political art to have concrete activist results, at least not immediately. As the upcoming chapters will bring in the notion of the voice in participatory practices, it is a good moment to remember that whispering could be more potent than screaming, and that not betraying your subjects in a participatory project is a pretty good result.

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[41] Among these he mentioned the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, tensions between Mizrahi and Ashkenazi Jews, those between religious and secular residents, and integration problems of new immigrants from the 1990s.

[42] This rendition relates to Nancy's warning of fascist communities, which I examined in the previous chapter.

The Infiltrators, Artport Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014

Curator: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 1. Asylum seekers demonstrating in Rabin Square, climbing on the Tomarkin Holocaust memorial, June 2014. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 2. The Sudanese think tank, part of Ghana Think Tank's process, outside Holot detention center in the Israeli Negev desert. Photo: Maayan Sheleff
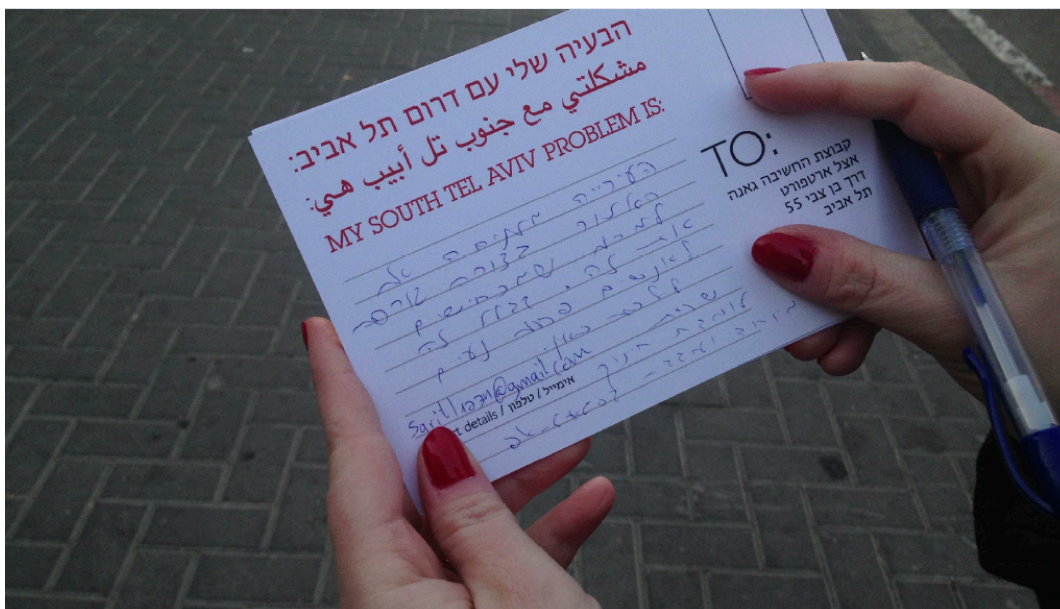
Fig 3. Problem collecting postcards, part of Ghana Think Tank's process, south Tel Aviv. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 4. Problem collecting vehicle, part of Ghana Think Tank's process, south Tel Aviv. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 5. Eritrean think tank, part of Ghana Think Tank's process, south Tel Aviv. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 6. The Sudanese think tank, part of Ghana Think Tank's process, outside Holot detention center in the Israeli Negev desert. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 7. Tour of south Tel Aviv led by Nadim Omar from the Sudanese think tank, part of Ghana Think Tank's process. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 8. Tour of south Tel Aviv led by Nadim Omar from the Sudanese think tank, part of Ghana Think Tank's process. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 9. *The Infiltrators*, installation view at Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014.

Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 10. Ghana Think Tank, installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 11. Ghana Think Tank, installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 12. Daniel Landau, Reside 1.4: Mount Zion, Darfur (2012), installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 13. Daniel Landau, Reside 1.4: Mount Zion, Darfur (2012), installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 14. Daniel Landau, Reside 1.4: Mount Zion, Darfur (2012), installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 15. Documentary Embroidery, Notes from Neve- Shaanan (2014), installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, south Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 16. Documentary Embroidery, Notes from Neve- Shaanan (2014),
installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, Tel Aviv, 2014. Photo:
Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 17. Documentary Embroidery, Notes from Neve- Shaanan (2014), detail

Fig 18. Paul Poet, Ausländer Raus! Schlingensief's Container (2002),
installation view in *The Infiltrators*, Artport gallery, south Tel Aviv, 2014.
Photo: Haim Yafim Barbalat

Fig 19. The infiltrators publication in Hebrew, Arabic and Tigrinya. Photo:
Haim Yafim Barbalat. For an online version of the publication:

https://cargocollective.com/INFILTRATORS

4. The Double-Edged Microphone: The Participatory and Performative Voice

The second chapter of this thesis laid the grounds for understanding participatory art and its various manifestations, on a scale of conflictual approaches. In the third chapter I began to examine what a participatory curatorial approach could be, through the concrete example of a curatorial project, scrutinising the ethical, aesthetic and political issues that arose. In this chapter I will focus on the political potential of the human voice in participatory methods, or in other words, on the voice as both a literal and a metaphorical manifestation of critical participation. Examining the character of the human voice and its potential political agency, I will differentiate between the realms of the voice and the gaze, examining which qualities of the voice reverberate the spaces between the 'I' and the 'We'. I will examine how deviant repetitions of speech act as a resistance to objectification, and how repetition can enact or enable public space, moving towards an understanding of this space in relation to exhibition making.

4.1 The Uncanny Voice

I previously mentioned Rancière's comment, quoted by Bishop, regarding the desired ambiguity of political art:[1] 'Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of a double effect; the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused, conversely, by the

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[1] Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, 29.

uncanny, by that which resists signification.'[2] This inherent conflict between a clear political meaning and what resists signification seems to be relevant throughout all my curatorial endeavours. When addressing the uncanny in terms of the voice, Freud mentions the layered potential of the singing voice, relating to a primal distinction between the seductive power of the feminine *jouissance* as the voice without words, and the authoritative power of the voice of the father. [3] In that sense, an inherent duality exists in the realm of the voice, between authority and obedience to subversive freedom, relating to the curatorial voice's inner conflict between agency and mediation and its objection to fixing meaning, which I'll return to later.

The uncanny, according to Freud, is something that was once reassuring and homely but has become estranged and unsettling. The uncanny voice is one that has been repressed, hidden, and then comes to light as a recurrence, repetition, echo.[4] Richard Coyne[5] describes the qualities of the uncanny voice as negating its comforting and alluring essence in favour of its unsettling aspects, manifested via repetition:

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[2] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 63.

[3] Freud, 'The Uncanny', 217–256.

[4] '…we can understand why the usage of speech has extended *das Heimliche* into its opposite *das Unheimliche*; for this uncanny is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression… if psychoanalytic theory is correct in maintaining that every emotional affect, whatever its quality, is transformed by repression into morbid anxiety, then among such cases of anxiety there must be a class in which the anxiety can be shown to come from something repressed which *recurs.*' Ibid., 13.

[5] Coyne, 'Voice and Space: Agency of the Acousmêtre in Spatial Design', 102–112.

> On one hand, there is something reassuring about the voice, that speaks
> of putative primal origins and participating in global communities...On
> the other hand, repetition contributes to the unsettling aspects of the
> voice, its disturbance, and its purchase in the realms of the uncanny.[6]

While repetition could be used to strengthen authoritarian voices that subordinate the subject, it could also be used to subvert and disturb this subordination. I will examine this later via Judith Butler's notion of deviant repetition of speech acts as a resistance to objectification, as well as via repetition as a form of creating agonistic public spaces. I will show how repetition of uncanny voices, and in particular female voices, are used in my curatorial projects to unsettle forms of control and separation, and establish temporary inoperative communities, to use Nancy's term; the most prominent example of which will be political choirs in the case study of the exhibition *Preaching to the Choir*, where the choirs manifest a sort of collective unconscious, disclosing what has been repressed by society.

4.2 The Voice and the Gaze

Coyne refers to Marshall McLuhan's theory of the nature of the voice [7], in which he speaks of aural history as stemming from an ancient time of a subconscious communal ethos, whereas the newer visual history of 'seeing', since the invention of writing and visual technologies, relates to objectifying and discriminating.[8] Coyne emphasises McLuhan's assertion of the return to the

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[6] Ibid., 106.

[7] Ibid., 104.

[8] Mcluhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*.

tribe in the electronic age of the 1960s through the incessant buzzing of the media. However, he differentiates between the radio—the sonic medium representing the voice—as a potentially inflammatory tool that calls for action as it requires imagination, and the TV and cinema—passive media that keep us at a distance and pacify us. The radio, as a medium that generates the voice without the gaze, enables us to imagine what is missing and to construct our own vision. Slavoj Žižek and Mladen Dolar[9] also examine the relations between the voice and the gaze, and their potential power to control and seduce, considering Lacan's concept of *object petit a*—the void or rupture created through the unfulfilled desire for the other. Dolar discusses the dual potential of the voice, on one hand a form of control, and on the other hand a catalyst for its loss. He addresses as well the feminine *jouissance* that was always considered to be dangerous and threatening for the hegemonic order.[10]

Like Dolar, Žižek addresses how the voice without language was perceived as dangerous in the past, and the dual role of the singing voice as on one hand generating liberating self-enjoyment, and on the other hand regulating self-discipline. Žižek exemplifies, via Lacan, how the political potential of the voice in relation to the lacuna is exposed:

> We have thus arrived at the formula of the relationship between voice and image: voice does not simply persist at a different level with regard to what we see, it rather points towards a gap in the field of the visible, toward the dimension of what eludes our gaze. In other words, their

[9] Dolar, 'The Object Voice', 7–31; and *Žižek*, 'I Hear You With My Eyes', 90–126.

[10] Dolar, 'The Object Voice,' 17–22, 27–28.

relationship is mediated by an impossibility: ultimately, we hear things because we cannot see everything.[11]

4.3 The Mouth as a Site of Choreography

Brandon LaBelle wrote about the paralinguistic, the manifestations of the voice that are not merely language or discourse but an expanded, experimental realm of vocal uttering.[12] At the centre of his research is the mouth:

> the mouth continually unsettles the limits of embodiment. It performs as an extremely vital link—the essential link—to the world and those around us, to echo and vibrate with a multitude of forces that pass through its chamber.[13]

The mouth for LaBelle connects the voice, that leaves us to be in the world, to our body and the subjectivity which it entails. It is a liminal place of tension between language as an abstract, socialising system, and our embodied, sensual experiences. LaBelle puts into question what Dolar identifies as the 'acousmatic' nature of the voice, a sounded event which can no longer be identified with its source, turning every emission of the voice to a sort of 'ventriloquism.'[14] Against this definition of the voice as an 'object,' which creates a break between what we see and what we hear, between the promise

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[11] *Žižek*, 'I Hear You With My Eyes', 93.

[12] LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*.

[13] Ibid., 2.

[14] Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More*, 70.

of an agency to its fulfilment, LaBelle prefers to refer to the voice as 'tension', a struggle to constitute the body that is trying to be a subject.[15]

 LaBelle mentions Fred Moten's treatment of the voice as precisely what resists forces of objectification, the voice as an 'irruption of phonic substance that cuts and augments meaning', an irruption in other words that is always already a someone intervening onto the structures of the social.[16] The mouth becomes the place of creating oneself as a subject, as it is so radically connected to both language and the body; it is the place of constant struggle between the force of objectification and the demand for subjectivity.

To have a voice is to be recognised as a subject, but it is also to locate oneself near the other. Thus, the mouth, for LaBelle, is a device for modulating the limits of the body, for exchanging knowledge with the world and the other. The constant movement between incorporation and expulsion and the reverberation between inside and outside, makes the mouth the site of a 'rhythm of somatic orientation, production, contact…choreography.'[17] As such it remains vulnerable to the intrusion of another, always in a state of flux; constantly becoming a subject who has a voice, but also a part of a collective, a choir of sorts: 'The mouth...is a cavity by which to capture additional voices, to put them on the tongue, supplying us with the potentiality to reshape, impersonate, sample, and reconstruct who we can be.'[18] The voice meets the body in a manner that extenuates how we use our voice to create a temporary

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[15] LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth*, 5.

[16] Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*,14.

[17] Ibid., 10.

[18] Ibid., 12.

community and at the same time to separate and distinguish ourselves from it as unique individuals. Throughout the thesis I will examine case studies in which the collective use of the human voice has enabled the formation of temporary communities, whilst at the same time reflexively examining the entanglement between the wish to maintain one's subjectivity and the need to belong to a group; in other words, I will examine the tensions between participation and refusal, manifested through the voice's fluctuations between consensual and dissensual utterings.

4.4 Ventriloquism and the Acousmetre

Steven Connor[19] differentiates between a vocal uttering of physical presence and one mediated via documentation, asking why people find it difficult to listen to their own recorded voice,[20] and suggesting that this is because they are confronted with aspects of their personality that become exposed when they hear their voice as heard by others. Thus, as in the liminal space of tension

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[19] Connor, *Dumbstruck: A Cultural History of Ventriloquism,* 4–5.

[20] Connor explains that with the recorded voice, instead of the continuous monitoring we do when listening to our own voice as it comes out through our mouth, the recording, which takes our voice out of time and out of our body, turns it into an object of perception rather than a medium of expression. By fixating on our voices, they are taken out of our control, and certain unwanted or hidden things come into light. Connor based these assumptions on a psychological investigation conducted by Philip S. Holzman and Clyde Rousey in 1966 which found that subjects hearing their own voices on tape either failed to recognise them or showed discomfort. Philip S.Holzman and Clyde Rousey, 'The Voice as a Percent', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 4 (1966), 79–86.

described by LaBelle, the sphere between different bodies and voices becomes entangled with conflictual relationships (even more so when mediated by technology and not by direct physical presence).[21]

Connor speaks about the disturbing effect of ventriloquism in terms of the relationship between sound and sight: as the eye is associated with the governing of space, ventriloquism, which creates sound that seems to be coming from nowhere, disrupts or transcends the seen space.[22] Connor compares ventriloquism to Michel Chion's definition of the acousmetre in film––an acoustic agency which is heard but not seen.[23] The unlocated voice is so discomforting because for humans the eye is what confirms danger—humans always need to know where a voice comes from, while they don't need to know what an image sounds like: 'From the beginning, then, hearing is a diffusely kinetic sense, producing states of arousal, attentiveness, or questioning anxiety, while seeing is an interpretive sense; where the ear stirs, the eye stills'.[24]

The realm of sight, says Connor, is related to domination and clarity of space and borders, because the eye can be shut—we can choose what to see and

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[21] Connor mentions Freud's concept of repression in his account of the constant monitoring of ourselves when we speak: 'we eavesdrop on our own speech, but do not, as it were, hear ourselves listening.' Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 8.

[22] Ibid., 15.

[23] Like a person who is hiding or is outside the frame, or a voice coming from a robot or a tape recorder, unlike the 'natural' voice of a character who is seen and heard, or the acousmatic voice which is heard but not derived from the action on the screen, like a voice over. Chion, *L'Audio-vision*, 107–17.

[24] Connor, *Dumbstruck*, 21.

what and when not to see. Sound, however, comes from everywhere at the same time, we can't control it, creating an experience of being one with the world and intermixing with it.[25] While to see is to govern space, to hear is to produce space. The undermining of the division between one's individual consciousness and the world, or between the self and others, produced by the voice, could cause disorientation and confusion. While Connor attributes this to a state of anxiety, for LaBelle it is a desired productive tension.

My perspective on the realm of the voice versus the realm of the gaze is not as essentialised as in the theories I have brought to the fore, as for me the interest lies in the entanglements between the two realms, manifested for example via video works that document vocal utterings. In addition, as I have shown, the voice itself holds a duality between its ability to control and its potential to undermine control. However, noting the multiple potentialities of the voice is useful for me in demonstrating its layered impact, in artistic representations as well as in sociopolitical situations, as I will specify later.

4.5 Speech Acts and Deviant Repetitions

Another way to probe the political agency of the voice, could be through the notion speech acts, one of the defining terms of performativity. J. L. Austin claimed that speech acts are utterances that don't just reflect the world; they are linguistic actions that take place in the world and thus make a difference, perhaps even produce a different world for some. To say something is to do something, and thus it is inherently political.[26] Judith Butler examined the ways

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[25] This is later disputed by Lawrence Abu Hamdan, in our conversation in chapter 7.

[26] Austin, 'How to Do Things with Words'.

in which we 'act' our identities, through dissonant or disruptive gestures via speech acts.[27] She claimed that culture is a process in the making, through which our identities keep re-forming. Thus, our activities and practices, our words and our actions, are not preset by our identities, but are constantly shaping who we are. Butler defined the performative process as potentially oppressive, as it normalises bodies and forces them to repeat restricting conventions. On the other hand, she saw performativity as offering a possibility to counter this process and produce the abnormal and the improper. The performative for Butler is thus a set of 'stylized repetition of acts'[28] that forges us as gendered subjects. For the performative to become subversive, there would need to be dissonant or disruptive gestures of performative identity.[29]

Without focusing exclusively on the relations between the exhibited works and Butler's performative theory, it's important to point out again the element of repetition which is central to many of the works in the various projects debated in this research, as I will show later. Repetition also weaves through many of the theories I look at in this thesis, always manifesting a duality between the alienating effect of repetition and its subversive, critical potential. Butler speaks about the repetitive structure of performativity in relation to Derrida, as a kind of 'enacted critique'.[30] Because the ideal identity construct is never achieved, it is repeated again and again. But this repetition is also what makes it vulnerable, as the norms are only a reenaction that attempts to become law. It

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[27] Loxley, 'Being Performative: Butler*'.*

[28] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York/London: Routledge,1999), 179.

[29] Loxley, 'Being Performative: Butler'.

[30] Ibid.,123–124.

is like a spell that could be broken. This kind of repetition (or in Loxley's words, deviant repetition or misperformance) connects to Derrida's argument that 'the iterability that underlies the possibility of a system of conventions is at the same time the means by which things happen otherwise, the opportunity for 'literatures' or 'revolutions' that as yet have no mode.'[31] In this context Butler adapts Derrida's deconstruction of the distinction between serious and nonserious speech acts: the nonserious (or fictional, and for our purpose, artistic) acts are a citation of the serious (or 'real') acts, that could serve to undermine them. This iterability and citationality is what in fact exposes the process by which performativity constructs gender or other forms of identity constructs, and at the same time enables a pervasive performativity.

This relates back to Althusser's concept of 'interpellation': the process in which the subject is produced through being hailed or addressed by a powerful ideology.[32] 'The body,' Butler suggests, 'is not simply a sedimentation of speech acts by which it has been constituted. If that constitution fails, a resistance meets interpellation at the moment it exerts its demand.'[33] Thus, performativity is the traumatic force of normalisation, but also the way in which those oppressed by it resist. Participation in a political performance of resistance would then need to involve a questioning of the norms and values while acting them out.

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[31] Derrida, *Limited Inc*, 100.

[32] Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' .

[33] Butler, *Excitable Speech*,155.

Fred Moten differentiated between a performance of surplus that relates to the fetishisation of reproduction, and a repetition with difference.[34] He describes these repetitions as migrations, arrivals or (re)births, as part of a constellation––an echo of others, an anticipation of other migrations.[35] In my interpretation of his poetic and complex writing, I am careful not to take it out of context, as Moten writes about radical Blackness, an experience and state of being which I cannot fully delve into here. However, I'm curious as to how this idea of repetition as anticipation might connect to the notion of preenactment, which I will return to later. Instead of looking at the one-directional gaze of racism, one

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[34] Moten, 'Voices/Forces, Migration, Surplus and the Black Avant Garde', 47–57. Moten wrote this essay in the context of his poetic description of the work of Beauford Delaney, a Tennessee-born African American painter who moved to New York in the 1930s and later to Paris. While comparing his paintings with the work and life of Artaud, as well as to jazz musician Strayhorn, Moten discusses the concept of Black avant-garde as a contradictory term: on one hand, the European avant-garde is a racist construct, a performance of surplus related to a fetishistic colonial ritual of value and to slavery, to commodification and a technologically induced exhaustion. On the other hand, he finds in Delaney's painting a gestural extremity, which he describes as 'irreducible phonic substance, vocal exteriority', that while representing a psychic, political and sexual illness, is also enabling recovery, and manifesting identity's relation to upheaval. Moten thinks of the New York avant-garde as a turning point as well as a vanishing point, describing it choreographically through rhythm analysis, and spatially via mobility and displacement. For him, the avant-garde is not only temporal but also spatial––a combination of what had been before and what will come after, as it comes 'before' the others. The avant-garde then becomes a 'queer/black/proletarian rematerialization of bourgeois space/time', through voice and noise.

[35] Ibid., 50.

that postcolonial theories attempted to reverse, Moten uses concepts of voice, sound and music (even when he writes about painting) to describe a penetrable sphere of repression and trauma, that can turn into a place of healing. As he writes, his own voice is also repeating, reoccurring, echoing. He resists the interpretation of 'hearing voices' as merely madness and connects it to the manifestation of surplus as 'the emergence from broken matrilinearity of an insistent reproductive materiality.' In other words, he thinks of the political implications and history of the primal overhearing of a phonic materiality as always tied to the ongoing loss or impossible recovery of the maternal. The female voice, and more specifically the primal maternal voice, is what is being echoed through those fugitive repetitions with difference.[36] It manifests what cannot be seen, records what has disappeared but at the same time ruptures its interpretation:

> Here lies universality, in this break, this cut, this rupture. Song cutting speech. Scream cutting song. Frenzy cutting scream with silence, movement. The West is an insane asylum, a conscious and premeditated receptacle of black magic. Every disappearance is a recording. That's what resurrection is. Insurrection. Scat black magic, but to scat or scatter is not to admit formlessness. The aftersound is not a bridge. It ruptures interpretation even as the trauma it records disappears.[37]

Another important point here, regarding the reciprocal relationship between meaning and its loss and between language and performativity, is the manifestation of voice through writing. In the 'The Grain of the Voice', Ronald

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[36] Ibid., 54–55.

[37] Ibid., 56.

Barthes writes about the place where the voice meets language through song; a place that produces *jouissance*, a sort of uncontrolled joy, a place of tension that is difficult to define or write about. He differentiates between the geno-song or geno-text and the pheno-song or pheno-text: where the second stays within the realm of representation and expression, to easily convey a message, the first explores the very structure of language. The melody deconstructs how language works and produces identification.[38]

Brandon LaBelle explains why Roland Barthes is led to an acoustic metaphor at the very end of his book *The Pleasure of the Text*, when describing a form of language which Barthes calls 'writing aloud', that searches for 'pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh...the articulation of the body, of the tongue, not that of meaning, of language.'[39]

I will return to the relationship between the voice and the gaze, and more specifically the realm of the voice as an uncanny reverberation of a traumatic loss throughout this thesis. I will show how the various works exemplify disruptive performative gestures as a break, an interruption that embodies criticality. The deviant repetitions take shape in the form of reflexive displacements of certain texts and their rearticulation and exhaustion. The texts are taken from the 'real' sphere into the artistic one, where they are

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[38] Barthes, 'The Grain of the Voice', 179–189. Barthes' performative description of speech finding form through acoustics connects to LaBelle's rendering of the relations between noise and music here: Brandon LaBelle, 'Private Call–Public Speech: the Site of Language, the Language of Site', *Writing Aloud— the Sonics of Language*, eds. Brandon LaBelle and Christof Migone, (New York: Errant Bodies Press with Ground Fault Recordings, 2001), 69–70.

[39] Brandon LaBelle, 'Private Call–Public Speech'.

deconstructed and undermined through repetition. Many of the works also break the texts into unintelligible forms, without words, such as humming, or singing the sounds of machinery, in order to further deconstruct the governance of language and amplify the endless, never-fixed formation of meaning and identity. This 'echoing with a difference', as I will call it later via Spivak, disrupts commonly accepted constructs of identity, citizenship, nationality and collectivity. As a curator, I rearticulate the rearticulation of the artists, echoing the echoes. Even while writing about them, I continue to repeat and rearticulate what they mean, attempting to find a rhythm, these moments of 'song', of a shift from a representational sphere to an embodied one, constantly working through my curatorial identity, without ever fixing the meaning. In parallel, I reflect on my own writing of this thesis, as another form of echoing which is by itself conflicted as it attempts to produce meaning from processes of embodiment that escape signification.

4.6 Public Space as Repetition and Rearticulation

The theme of rearticulation through repetition relates to Oliver Marchart's rendition of the creation of the political public space. In order for the public sphere (or any discourse, system or structure for that matter) to be political, Marchart states, via Laclau, that a temporal dislocation needs to occur within a set spatial structures—a dislocation which produces a constitutive ambivalence.[40] The process of hegemonisation of time by space, or spatialisation, uses repetition in order to define a meaning and create myths— for example myths constructed around national history and their representation

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[40] Oliver Marchart, 'Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s). Some basic observations on the difficult Relation of Public Art, Urbanism and Political Theory',3.

in the form of monuments. When they lose their origin in the course of repetition, they become perceived as natural, necessary and unchangeable in collective memory.[41] However, this relational system of spatial articulation, which defines itself against its outside, time, can never be fully constituted, hence it is a process of continuous (failing) articulation, of attempting to hegemonise time by processes of spatialisation, via repetition.

This articulation has a double movement—on the one hand, hegemonic articulation, leading to a claim of 'sedimentary forms of objectivity' (Husserl, Laclau, Jameson), or a 'naturalised' social sphere (Barthes). Sedimentation for Husserl refers to the routinisation and forgetting of origins, while Laclau describes the fixing of meaning into a precise choreography. However, the articulation could also be reactivated through the temporalisation of space, through the unfixing of meaning towards a relational nature. This concept of reactivation and unfixed choreography relates again to Judith Butler's notion of deviant repetitions as they are manifested in the cultural-artistic representational realm.

Laclau relates temporality to the political—antagonism, or 'dislocation, disturbance, interruption, event'—everything that is outside the practice of spatialisation.[42] For Laclau, the practice of decentring through antagonism, or the plurality of public spaces, is what defines a radically democratic society—one that can never reach a fixed identity or meaning. Marchart notes how Deutsche frames Mouffe and Laclau:

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[41] Ibid., 4.

[42] Ibid., 5–6.

Public space emerges with the abandonment of the belief in an absolute basis of social unity…negativity is thus part of any social identity, since identity comes into being only through a relationship with an 'other' and, as a consequence, cannot be internally complete…Laclau and Mouffe use the term antagonism to designate the relationship between a social identity and a 'constitutive outside' that blocks its completion. Antagonism affirms and simultaneously prevents the closure of society, revealing the partiality and precariousness—the contingency—of every totality.[43]

Marchart connects the emergence of the civic public space with what Lefort calls (following Tocqueville) 'the democratic revolution', the beheading of Louis XVI, as a symbolic disembodiment of the place of power in society, making room for a civic public space of the political via conflictual debate. As such, democracy is the institutionalisation of conflict which must be reactivated again and again, constantly negotiated.[44]

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[43] Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics,* 13-14.

[44] Marchart, 'Art, Space and the Public Sphere(s)', 14:

> The secession of an empty place from the state, the separation of the spheres of power of law and knowledge, the emergence of an autonomous sphere of the civil society, and finally of the public sphere in which the legitimatory foundations of society, having lost their transcendental status, must be renegotiated again and again…Democracy is the institutionalisation of conflict—i.e. of the debate about the foundations of society—or it is none. Institutionalisation means the attested legitimacy of public debate about what is legitimate and what is illegitimate. The public sphere is not so much a pre-existent space in which this debate occurs or to which it is assigned. On the

It is interesting to think in this context of the practice of some activists in recent years, to literally behead or disembody monuments that represent racism, inequality or violence; it is as if they make space for a new interpretation of the public space, and indeed many times these former monuments become a place for ephemeral debates, writings, or objects, that mark the shifting of identity positions and hegemonic perceptions. It is important to differentiate, even if it seems obvious, between the destruction of cultural monuments by terrorist groups like ISIS and the destruction of monuments by protest movements such as Black Lives Matter, depending upon the identity of the one who destroys and what is being destroyed: while ISIS destroys cultural monuments as a form of dominating through violence, in a similar manner to how they behead actual human beings, Black Lives Matter produce symbolic violence in order to protest actual violence that Black people have suffered through history, replacing the symbols of this violence with a possibility of a new discourse. In addition, ISIS are motivated by the will to destroy memory and history in a sort of twisted, negative mirror to Marchart's suggestion: they break the heritage and eliminate the meaning to prevent any sense of belonging, either national or religious, that is different to their vision of a brutally oppressive Islamic state. To this end, they destroy Muslim mosques, Christian churches and ancient monuments. They do not vacate the place of hegemony to make room for democracy, but to make room for a dictatorship of religion. Alternatively, the disembodiment of monuments by protest movements does not come to cancel any sense of

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contrary, the public sphere must be created again and again precisely by means of conflictual debate about the foundations of society and the scope of rights (albeit on the absolute foundation of the right to have rights), and the extension of rights to new groups of the population.

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history but to replace prevailing historical narratives with an embodiment of what cannot yet be imagined, to create a vacancy as an invitation.[45]

This debate regarding the elimination of monuments that stand for traumatic pasts for certain communities is part of a larger debate regarding censorship of potentially hurtful art. The question of when freedom of speech should prevail and when something is too hurtful to be made public, and for whom, has become more complex recently. Contextualised within a discussion on antagonisms in artistic utterings, a question arises of whether there is a moment in which nuanced antagonistic gestures stop being constitutive and become too violent, and in which case a clear removal of a hurtful symbol is more fitting for our times than its reappropriation or accentuation, as some of the antagonistic works I render attempt to do. From the opposing perspective, one might ask if the newly found sensitivities of and towards those who are reclaiming and rearticulating their identities beyond an oppressive past, which posits an exciting opportunity to imagine different futurities, has the risk of playing into the wrong hands. As I have specified in the introduction in the case of Israel, hegemonic entities now take advantage of the discourse and call for the removal of works due to supposed sensitivities of various communities, but in fact use this to mask the reinforcement of existing narratives and to continue and produce unbalanced power relations, discrimination and violence. In addition, what constitutes public space, democracy and free speech continues

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[45] From another, very different perspective, my own identity is tied to a failing to separate religion and democracy. Israel's own definition as a 'democratic and Jewish State' shows the inner conflict which puts it in a constant struggle—in so far as it insists on being intrinsically connected to religious myths and privileged perceptions of citizenship bound to religion and born from them, it cannot be fully democratic.

to be stretched and rearticulated: in Israel, an extreme right-wing government claims that since it was elected democratically it can now bring down the entire legal system and in fact cancel democracy, while at the same time it outlaws the use of the Palestinian flag in demonstrations and withdraws funding from critical art, claiming that both flag and art incite terrorism; in the United States and Brazil, demonstrating masses storm government buildings and claim that they are performing the true democratic act as elections were rigged. As Judith Butler aptly put it:

> But if and when political orders deemed democratic are brought into crisis by an assembled or orchestrated collective that claims to be the popular will, to represent the people along with a prospect of a more real and substantive democracy, then an open battle ensues on the meaning of democracy, one that does not always take the form of a deliberation. Without adjudicating which popular assemblies are 'truly' democratic and which are not, we can note from the start that the struggle over 'democracy' as a term actively characterizes several political situations. How we name that struggle seems to matter very much, given that sometimes a movement is deemed antidemocratic, even terrorist, and on other occasions or in other contexts, the same movement is understood as a popular effort to realize a more inclusive and substantive democracy.[46]

Returning to Marchart, he continues with Deutsche's definition of the construction of public space via political interventions: 'the political sphere is not only a site of discourse; it is also a discursively constructed site.'[47]

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[46] Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 2.

[47] Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics,* 289.

Consensus, for Marchart and Deutsche (as it is exemplified in Habermas' model of a rational unified public sphere), suppresses the public sphere as it halts the debate and denies the conflict or antagonism, thus leading to totalitarianism. The perception of a total or coherent public space always excludes what threatens its coherence, what is outside of it. Therefore, it is the dislocation of consensus, or dissent, where temporary alliances need to be rearticulated again and again—this is where public space or the political emerges. Most importantly for my purpose is Marchart's conclusion that the public space is not a place but a principle, wherever a temporal reactivation or dislocation of social sedimentation occurs, or a reactivation of space by time.[48] In that regard I would claim that my exhibitions attempt to temporarily reactivate or rearticulate myth, memory and identity, in order to enable a conflictual public sphere within the artistic realm—intending to temporarily turn the museum into a public sphere.

4.7 The Virtual Public Sphere Versus the Physical

If we were to return to the question of the internet as a virtual public sphere versus a physical public sphere, we should address the difference in the perception of time on the internet. In the first chapter I discussed the internet as a public arena which partakes in the articulation of hegemony as well as in the attempts to subvert it. Marchart mentions the myth of the internet as a decentralised rhizomatic space that avoids any spatialisation, via Sadie Plant's definition of cyber space that resists supervision, regulation or censorship and is always out of control, like urban spaces. However, Paolo Caffoni describes how time can be more easily governed on the internet, via the difference

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[48] Marchart, 'Space and the Public Sphere(s)', 14–17.

between a public and a crowd.[49] The bond that forms a public does not depend on physical contact but is defined as the 'action at a distance of one mind upon another.'[50] Communication technologies separate bodies but unite minds in the conviction of a particular idea or desire shared simultaneously by others. The greater the size of the public reached by a certain idea, the more topical it will seem, and the more it will continue to expand exponentially. While crowds are created in space, publics are created in time. One can be part of only one crowd at any given moment but can belong to multiple publics at the same time. These fragmented subjectivities undermine processes of belonging and negate subjective perceptions:

> The device for governing publics also involves this control of time: the expansion of topicality as a single temporal dimension of what is sensible corresponds to the elimination of any historical consciousness...News increasingly rushes in with information constantly updated, condemning us to live in an eternal present, in a world without memory, where images flow and merge, like reflections on the water.[51]

Thus, we can conclude that the temporality of the internet is different than the critical temporality described by Marchart as a public sphere. The way the algorithms work to constantly show us what they think we want to see,

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[49] Paolo Caffoni, 'Breaking from the Government of Publics'.

[50] Gabriel Tarde, 'Preface to the Second Edition', in *The Laws of Imitation*, trans. Elsie Clews Parsons (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1903 [1895]), xiv.

[51] Guy Debord, Comments on the Society of the Spectacle, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London and New York: Verso, 1998 [1988]),op. cit., 14, Thesis VI, cited by Paolo Caffoni, 'Breaking from the Government of Publics.

produces an endless feedback loop of appeasing convictions and supposed truths, without doubt or debate, like a constant shouting devoid of listening.

Fred Moten and Stefano Harney defined the internet as a laborious factory that encourages a practice of logistics rather than a practice of care. Via Shoshana Zuboff's *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*[52] they described how Facebook and Google make money through collecting data that is invested not merely in tracking behaviour but in changing it. Having us labour on obsessive self-management of logistics aims to prevent us from caring for one another, by making us look at one another.[53] Moten and Harney poetically propose modes of resistance, within this impossibility of denying access to bodies—resistance that involves deregulating language, moving wrong or not moving as a sabotage of the assembly line of logistical capitalism.

If we are to connect this back to thoughts about the beheading of monuments by protest movements, Moten and Harney provide a sharp lens through which to consider the refusal to look at images and myths that were created by a violent gaze, in favour of an incomplete future imagination:

> How can we survive genocide? We can only address this question by studying how we have survived genocide. In the interest of imagining what exists there is an image of Michael Brown we must refuse in favor of another image we don't have. One is a lie, the other unavailable. If we refuse to show the image of a lonely body, of the outline of the space that body simultaneously took and left, we do so in order to imagine

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[52] Shoshana Zuboff, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*, (London: Profile Books, 2019).

[53] Harney and Moten, '*All Incomplete*'.

jurisgenerative black social life walking down the middle of the street—for a minute, but only for a minute, unpoliced, another city gathers, dancing. We know it's there, and here, and real; we know what we can't have happens all the time.[54]

This tension between the digital space as a tool for spreading dissent and its inherent qualities as eliminating a sense of history and criticality is reflected upon in many of the works in this thesis. Some of the works that were shown in the various projects studied in the thesis fluctuate between perceiving the internet as an assembly line, and remembering its promise as a place for political assemblies. However, other works imply that the kind of temporality needed for a critical sphere of antagonism is an embodied one, through an assembly of bodies in a certain space, in a certain time. In the upcoming chapter I will also test whether the temporality of an exhibition, experienced via an embodied route in space and time, can also produce an antagonistic encounter that enacts a democratic public sphere and invites critical awareness; this could potentially be achieved not via fixed representations and displays but through offering a certain guided tour through collective memory, as I will exemplify in the upcoming chapters. Accompanied by workshops and performances that invite bodies and voices to assemble and directly participate, the exhibitions juxtapose previous (documented) participatory formations with contemporary ones, resonating voices and bodies from across space and time.

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[54] Ibid., 45.

4.8 Smuggling or Infiltrating? Crossing Borders as Embodying Criticality

As aforesaid, the case studies in this thesis are artistic representations that attempt to temporally reactivate or rearticulate myth, memory and identity, in order to enable a conflictual public sphere within the artistic realm—or in other words to temporarily turn the exhibition into a public sphere. The repetition exhibited in the works in *Preaching to the Choir*, as well as in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies* and *Voice Over*, exemplify the double movement of articulation—showing the hegemonising potential of repetition, while at the same time rearticulating a performative sphere of voices and bodies that attempt to unfix the meaning. The concept of rehearsal also repeats throughout the different projects, implying a never-ending process of rearticulation, whereas the exhibition as a temporal structure is in struggle with the museum or gallery as a spatial institution.

The concept of the exhibition as a temporal political activation of space relates to Irit Rogoff's notion of embodied criticality. Rogoff describes criticality as a state of profound frustration, where instead of finding fault or passing judgment according to a consensus of values, we performatively and reflectively embody an uncertain present. This inhabitation or 'living things out' puts us in a heightened state of awareness and has a transformative power:

> ...in a reflective shift, from the analytical to the performative function of observation and of participation, we can agree that meaning is not excavated for, but rather, that it takes place in the present...we have moved from criticism which is a form of finding fault and of exercising judgement according to a consensus of values, to critique which is examining the underlying assumptions that might allow something to

appear as a convincing logic, to criticality which is operating from an uncertain ground of actual embeddedness.[55]

Rogoff points to the problematics of using critical analyses in order to expose hidden truths and power relations, or as a didactic attempt to cast blame on social or political wrongs, because there is no immanent meaning or absolute truth to uncover. She suggests instead an embodied criticality as a performative and reflexive mode of practice that takes place in the special and temporal event of the exhibition (or the classroom in the case of academic studies)—a form of inhabiting the problem rather than analysing it, where participants, audiences, students or researchers produce meaning through the relations with one another. Criticality is the understanding that there is no objective knowledge as we are always living the same conditions that we are trying to analyse, a state from which there is no critical distance but a duality of always being 'empowered and disempowered, knowing and unknowing.'[56]It is a state of frustration and heightened awareness that could have a transformative power. Rogoff relates this mode with the practice of the curatorial rather than curating—a shift away from thematic illustration and into a realm of relations and ideas that are yet unknown:

> For some time now we have been differentiating between 'curating', the practice of putting on exhibitions and the various professional expertise it involves and 'the curatorial', the possibility of framing those activities through series of principles and possibilities. In the realm of 'the curatorial' we see various principles that might not be associated with displaying works of art; principles of the production of knowledge, of

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[55] Rogoff, *Smuggling—an Embodied Criticality*, 2.

[56] Ibid, 3.

activism, of cultural circulations and translations that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage. In a sense 'the curatorial' is thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself, does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict…. Moving to 'the curatorial' then, is an opportunity to 'unbound' the work from all of those categories and practices that limit its ability to explore that which we do not yet know or that which is not yet a subject in the world.[57]

The curatorial, according to Rogoff, blurs the boundaries between disciplines, categories and practices, like art and politics, theories and practice or analysis and action. The term 'smuggling' was also used by Rogoff to define a mode of practice in relation to the curatorial and embodied criticality, that has much relevance to my curatorial practice, but also some differences which I would like to linger on. For this I will return to the term 'infiltration', which I used in a project with African asylum seekers I curated in 2014. As I explained in the extensive account of this project in chapter three, *The Infiltrators* was not only the name of the exhibition but a mode of participatory art and curatorial practice. As I wrote, I incorporated and subverted this derogatory term to imply the crossing of borders between the white cube and the public sphere, as well as the borders with which we define the differences between individuals and communities: 'Infiltration became a tool to challenge preconception and to destabilise power relations, through lingering on the borderline, within the liminal spaces between points of contention. Infiltrating in that sense is the physical and metaphorical manifestation of conflictual curating...

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[57] Ibid., 3.

Rogoff relates the term smuggling to the preoccupation with migration and the movement of people across borders and its political implications, and how it asks us to rethink citizen rights and notions of belonging. However, with her focus on smuggling and contraband, she also focuses on objects, while infiltration focuses on people, and thus for me is a more apt term for describing what I search for in a participatory curatorial methodology. Another difference is my focus on embodied antagonisms— Rogoff describes smuggling's illegal aspect as a sort of shadow play that invites thinking of shady artistic or curatorial practice, in order to unbound borders, knowledges and practices,[58] but emphasises the nonconflictual aspects of this mode of practice; for example when she describes it as a fluid movement of dissemination that glides along borders, or a 'performative disruption that does not produce itself as a conflict'[59] nor breaches the border. For me, the crossing of borders is a relational and conflictual practice—it forgoes the (smuggled) object altogether and focuses solely on the (infiltrating) subjects, and it accounts the subjects as having agency over their movement, rather than being carried across borders, albeit this agency is not a privileged choice but a desperate attempt at survival.

Infiltration, as opposed to smuggling, does not glide along the lines, but crosses them; it does not disregard boundaries, but deliberately penetrates them. At the same time, as tempting as it is to differentiate the two terms, I realise that what Rogoff is doing, with her carefully crafted language of philosophical resistance, is to offer a fracture that is workable from inside the system, to allow an opening for other forms of border crossing. Perhaps, smuggling invites infiltration, which in turn could invite other tactics. In that sense, I'm interested

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[58] Ibid., 3–4.

[59] Ibid, 4.

in Rogoff's notion of inhabiting the border, where I recognise a kindred conflictual potential:

> Evocation of a smuggling practice is how it does not breach a line, does not turn it into a 'border' in the classic sense, but traces a parallel economy, going over its lines again and again and in the process making them an inhabitation, expanding the line of division into an inhabited spatiality that someone else might also occupy, slip along until the opportune moments comes along to slip over.[60]

Rogoff sees smuggling as a method of 'looking away' from conflicts, in order to be able to imagine something new without constantly stating what it is we oppose, a sort of soft refusal versus resistance. While I'm aware of the benefits of working from within the system (the museum, the academy), from a position of power, I fear the risk of using this mode as an excuse to avoid controversy and censorship, especially when working in a contested sphere such as Israel. I fear that while the privileged ones who will be working in this mode (albeit mostly precariously, no matter how institutional their institution is), will be able to inhabit the problems and imagine alternatives, these practices will remain invisible to most people, who are exposed to so much propaganda and supposed absolute truths that these subtle tactics will remain on the margins of their visibility. It is also important to mention that Rogoff's text was written in 2006, and it is intriguing to think how the crisis of 2007–2008 and the following protest movements debated in this thesis affected the use of such soft power tactics as politically situated curating.

As I show from different perspectives throughout the thesis, various notions that have been deemed politically effective in the first decade of the twenty-first

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[60] Ibid., 4.

century can no longer be read in the same manner—among them the use of 'soft power' on the one hand, and over identification as an extreme antagonistic practice on the other. I don't claim to offer an extensive historical account of how political and artistic developments happened simultaneously, nor do I offer a guide for new 'appropriate' curatorial practices; on the contrary, I attempt to complicate the notion of what is appropriate and what isn't, in a world that is becoming increasingly polarised and absolutist.

I slowly try to unfold these questions in regard to my own practice, without assuming that I have all the answers. My assumption is that antagonistic practices, with their sometimes-provocative co-option of manifestations of traumas, have made them suspect to misreading and misuse. Thus, they have received criticism and suspicion from a younger generation of practitioners affected by protest movements and their increasing insistence on strict identity-related rules of conduct. This insistence on transparent ethics and clear messages is also a backlash to the right wing's 'creative' use of segregational propaganda. While I understand and appreciate this suspicion, I attempt to find a nuanced approach, not devoid of antagonisms, ambiguities and confusion, but at the same time one that encourages care and ethics, acknowledging the differences between various communities without essentialising their identities.

As I previously discussed, I place my practice in the vicinity of Marchart's conflictual aesthetics and Bishop's antagonistic participation, with reservations in terms of what kind of conflictuality is produced and what the different roles of the various agents— curator, artist, community, audience— are in relation to this conflictuality. However, as I have shown in relation to *The Infiltrators*, there are no promises as to the reception and understanding of this kind of practice by heterogenic audiences. With *The Infiltrators*, I was attempting to allow irony, reflexivity, provocation and confusion, while maintaining a sense of safety, agency and empathy amongst the participants and between them and

the audience. But this wasn't always translatable to the audience; perhaps this was a liminal moment when things were changing, unfolding, and not fully understood just yet.

The liminality that is emphasised through Rogoff's concept of smuggling is crucial for my practice, and more specifically the notion of lingering on the border—the border between one person and another, between the mouth and the outside world, between the one and the many, between identities, between the artistic representational sphere and the 'real' public sphere, between the emancipatory potential of participation manifested with voices and bodies and an always looming possibility of its co-option and oppression. As I wrote before, I imagine the role of the curator as positioned between the instigation of a conflict and navigating and controlling its borders. Borders are also present more literally in all my curatorial projects, and particularly in the first and last project—the border crossing of the asylum seekers, turned into crossing borders with participatory art in *The Infiltrators,* and the borders that define identity constructs, silence voices and curtail bodies, in *Voice Over*, to which I'll return.

In the catalogue of the exhibition *Say Shiboleth*,[61] curated by Boaz Levin, Zali Gurevitch wrote about the relations between borders and identities, in a

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[61] Levin and I found various correlations between his exhibition *Say Shibboleth! On Visible and Invisible Borders,* and my own exhibition *Voice Over,* and had a conversation about it in the frame of the conference *Curating On Shaky Grounds—in Times of Crisis and Conflict.* More information and a recording of the talk, titled 'On the Tip of the Tongue: Art and Politics Between Sound and Sight', can be found here:

manner which echoes my own perception of participatory curating as entailing an intense meeting with others:

> What we call 'identity' is, actually, two contradictory and not necessarily well-balanced motions of thickening and thinning. The thick border implies a place, an identity, while the thin border implies non-place, being on the edge of place, in hesitation. Thus to be on the thin border is to be in a state of limbo, which Victor Turner called 'betwixt and between',[62] a liminal state between two categories, no longer belonging to the first but not yet having reached the second, suspended between before and after, outside of structure, in a confused, contradictory, sometimes paradoxical state…Stepping out of the envelope and realizing that the other can be recognized and met face to face, is a critical moment in the journey of identity. On occasion, it emerges as a confrontation, an agonistic encounter, changing from a circular horizon to a front line. Confrontational otherness creates, in turn, a theory of crossing over, of dialogue, dialectic—a theory of recognition… In order to reach self-awareness, one must develop a sense of border, at least minimally, to acknowledge the question of 'who?'; to recognize that

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https://artis.art/curatorial_programs/curatorial_workshops/curating_on_shaky_grounds_curating_in_times_of_crisis_and_conflict

[62] Victor Turner, 'Betwixt and Between: the Liminal Period in Rites of Passage', in Victor Turner (ed.), *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), 93–111.

identity has limits and beyond those limits lies otherness. To deny the other is to limit one's ability to achieve self-awareness.[63]

4.9 The Exhibition as Embodied Criticality—Producing a Public Sphere in the Museum

Going back to Rogoff's embodied criticality, I would like to focus on how this turns the spotlight onto the various bodies and voices that take part in the moment of the exhibition, as a set of subjective relations. Rogoff suggests a collectivity not based on the relations of a community but on the relations between members of an audience, a sort of 'low key participation' that could redefine the role of the audience as participators rather than passive spectators. Within this moment of coming together arbitrarily to take part in an exhibition or cultural event, Rogoff offers to let go of the usual roles of viewers or listeners and allow an emergent performative collectivity that produces new recognitions of kinship beyond the normative modes of identity constructs.[64]

Rogoff searches for this different collectivity via Nancy's 'being singular plural'[65] (which I explained in depth before) and his objection to essentialised notions of community. According to Rogoff, the moment of sharing meaning is in fact

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[63] Zali Gurevitch, 'On the Border: Barriers and Passages', in *Say Shiboleth! On Visible and Invisible Borders*, eds. Boaz Levin, Hanno Loewy and Anika Reichwald (BUCHER Verlag Hohenems–Wien–Vaduz, 2018)*,* for the Jewish Museum Hohenems, 33–41.

[64] Rogoff, 'We—Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations'.

[65] Nancy, *Being Singular Plural.*

for Nancy the sharing of being, and thus the relation between one and another is not based the segregatory articulation of identity:

> We do not 'have' meaning any more, because we ourselves are meaning—entirely, without reserve, infinitely, with no more meaning other than 'us'...There is no meaning then if meaning is not shared, and not because there would be an ultimate or first signification that all beings have in common, but because meaning is itself the sharing of being.[66]

If we are meaning and the only meaning is what circulates between us, then the meaning only comes from sharing it with others in a certain moment, and not from a predetermined articulation of identity. In that sense, being an audience in an exhibition is by itself a participatory experience, and distances itself from the object-viewer dichotomy. In that regard, Rogoff speaks of participation in an exhibition in a different way than all of the theoretical renditions of the participatory that I have specified in the first chapter—all of which relate to a certain intention or score laid out by the artist. Rogoff's concept allows us to think of the curatorial separately from the artistic intention, and of the exhibition as a potentially participatory format regardless of whether the works themselves are participatory or not:

> In Nancy's assertion that 'everything, then, passes between us' do we not also have the conditions of the exhibition? And in these conditions do we not have the possibilities to shift the gaze away from art works that might critically alert us to certain untenable states of the world, away from exhibitions that make those states of hegemonic breach and unease the subject and focal point of saturated vision, and towards

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[66] Rogof,'We—Collectivities, Mutualities, Participations', 3.

everything that passes between us in the process of those confrontations. Therefore we do not necessarily undergo an experience of being informed, of being cautioned, of being forced to look at that which we might so comfortably avert our gaze from, but perhaps we recognise how deeply embedded we are in the problematic, of how mutual our disturbance and fear and that we in Nancy's words 'share this turmoil' as the very production of its meanings.[67]

In relation to her differentiation between criticality and critique, Rogoff suggests thinking of the exhibition not as a thematic or didactic narrative but as a stage, or a scene, 'on which several can say "I" each on his own account, each in turn', creating a plurality which is always entangled and divided, a case specific, nonhomogonous 'we'. Rogoff would like the exhibition to produce not a binary political demonstration, but a 'state of appearance' (Arendt), a 'fleeting coming together in momentary gestures of speech and action.'[68]

But what would these gestures and actions entail? What would a curator need to construct in order to allow this kind of criticality to emerge in an exhibition space? Would all exhibitions encourage criticality as they are the meeting place of an audience with its fellow members? Rogoff relates this embodied criticality with shifting the gaze away from works that either alert us to hegemonic states or enact them and onto 'everything that passes between us in the process of those confrontations.' She suggests a state of compassion as a form of entanglement, of noninterpellated gestures that do not attempt to resonate with

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[67] Ibid., 3.

[68] Ibid., 4.

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politics in the real world or to turn the space of appearance into a state of action. She offers a possibility of a 'politics without a plan.'[69]

Rogoff explains that her intention is not to treat the exhibition just as an ephemeral dialogical sphere, but to make its means visible in order to acknowledge our mutualities and imbrications and thus produce a political space. For me, Rogoff's poetic guidelines offer an appealing language of uncertainty with which to probe what participatory curating might entail, one which encompasses a wide variety of curatorial possibilities. At the same time, it elusively avoids giving concrete examples of a how such a political space of appearance could be produced through a curatorial articulation of meaning that unfolds in space and time. More specifically, it doesn't specify how one can acknowledge mutualities as well as difference without interpellation and identity politics.

Rogoff writes that 'beyond the shared categories of class, or taste or political or sexual orientations another form of "WE" is produced in these processes of viewing.'[70] But this mutuality is still limited to the homogenic audiences that come to exhibition spaces; while the audience members of a typical art institution might differ in gender and taste, they most likely won't differ in class, and arguably in their political orientation. Art spaces and exhibitions are still exclusionary to some audiences—whether due to financial reasons such as not being able to afford ticket prices, lacking time for culture when having to work hard for a living, or simply the feeling that one is not welcome in these spaces because of their history of exclusive and elitist attitudes. In Israel, art spaces are also sometimes accused of being too 'left wing'; this expresses a

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[69] Ibid., 5.

[70] Ibid., 1.

mishmash of criticisms of art as representing a 'white' (or Ashkenazi in the local context), snobbish elite, and accusations of it being supposedly insensitive towards certain community values (for example when parodying or criticising religion). As I've mentioned before, there have been several cases of art works being censored or funds that have been cut for those reasons. The result of this is that most mainstream art institutions show crowd- pleasing, noncontroversial works, as a preventative self-censorship. This brings me back to the risk in the assumption that the very act of coming together is political. Even if the audience was not homogenous, I doubt if the very act of coming together in a space to view exhibitions would mark a shift in its identity perceptions. Thus, as this philosophy is not translated into a specific curatorial score or any particular method or approach that can be practiced, it holds the risky promise that any exhibition can serve as a space for this meeting of bodies in a transformative manner.

4.10 Embodying Critique or Research as First-Person Account: the Case of *Truth is Concrete*

In the introduction to the thesis, I mentioned the use of embodiment in relation to both curating and writing, and how the question of the agency of the curatorial voice relates both to curating participation and to writing about it. This inherently adheres to the very definition of participation, for how would one write about participation in a manner which reflects the experiences of all involved, without participating in it? If I want to reflect the complexities of curating participation I should speak not only from the position of the curator, but also from the experiences of a participant. Thus, I switch the role and write a first person account from the point of view of a participant in two case studies: reporting on *Truth is Concrete* (2011) and on *documenta 15* (2022), two mega events of participatory curating which symbolise the beginning and the end of

a decade of turmoil. The reports are based, beyond my own experience and interpretation, on conversations with the curators, artists and other participants, in order to reflect the multivoiced complexity of participation.

I mention in the introduction that my first-person accounts are inspired by feminist writing and research that encourage an embodied, performative position, attempting to manifest a heterogenic, situated collectivity that exemplifies mutuality alongside differences. Among them, I mentioned Marina Garces' call to render personal experiences as a way to challenge the privatisation of our existence and search for the common—to linger on the 'I' in order to find the 'we'. Garces claims that our voices should reflect what our bodies endure when they meet other bodies, and in that sense her claim correlates with Donna Haraway's 'situated knowledges' and its emphasis on the importance of local personal accounts as holding a collective truth. In the next chapters I will return to the importance of first-person accounts from another angle: through the notion of echoing, via Ulrike Bergmann's embodied report on her conflictual participation in a protest, and Gayatri Spivak's exploration of the empowering potential in echoing with a difference. For now, let's take a trip back in time together to *Truth is Concrete*, and see how this individual-collective embodied report takes form.

Truth is Concrete was a curatorial experiment meant to exhaust and undermine social constructs, using curatorial performativity as its major tool. For me, the curatorial endeavor was participatory no less than it was performative, and while the curators emphasized its performative aspects, I would like to expose its participatory manifestations, both deliberate and undeliberate. I will question whether the project's enacted ritualised and deviant repetition of norms indeed ruptured prior conventions, while examining what made the project such a strong experience, from the point of view of a participant. In fact, participating

in this project in many ways planted the seeds of this research and helped me understand better my own curatorial methods.

The text that you are about to read, describing my experiential involvement in *Truth is Concrete*,[71] was commissioned for the book *Performativity as Curatorial Strategy*[72] upon the invitation of Florian Malzacher, one of the project's curators. In the text I consider the participatory and performative aspects of the curatorial tactics as manifesting conflicts with voices and bodies. I step out of my curatorial comfort zone and test the ground from the side of the participant, to probe the sort of embodied criticality I search for in participatory artistic and curatorial practices. I wrote this text in an intuitive manner, like a memoir, and gave it a parodic title, which paraphrases *Fear and Loathing in*

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[71] *Truth is Concrete, Political Practices in Art and Artistic Practices in Politics*, curators Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza, 2012, in the frame of *Steirischer Herbst* Festival, Graz, Austria. *Truth is Concrete* was a 24/7 marathon camp, with around three hundred lectures, panels, tactic talks, performances, concerts, films, workshops and a parallel, self-curated, spontaneous open marathon.

[72] Maayan Sheleff, 'Fear and Love in Graz', in *Empty Stages, Crowded Flats. Performativity as Curatorial Strategy, Performing Urgency #4,* eds. Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza (Berlin: House on Fire, Alexander Verlag and Live Art Development Agency, 2017), 131–135. With additional texts by Frédérique Aït-Touati, Knut Ove Arntzen, Nedjma Hadj Benchelabi, Claire Bishop, Beatrice v. Bismarck, Rui Catalão, Vanessa Desclaux, Tim Etchells, Galerie, Karin Harrasser, Shannon Jackson, Ana Janevski, Lina Majdalani, Ewa Majewska, Florian Malzacher, Gerald Siegmund, Claire Tancons, Kasia Tórz, Rachida Triki, Jelena Vesic, Joanna Warsza, Catherine Wood.

Las Vegas.[73] I dare to reference this canonical creation with a multilayered wink; to the methodology of writing, an embodied autobiographical account which rejects all claim for objectivity; to the immersion in an induced state of physical and mental confusion, exhaustion and exhilaration; and to the disillusionment with utopic perceptions of community and activist aspirations, overrun by the neoliberal dream of individual concurring.

4.10.1 *Fear and Love in Graz*

The Choir

Everybody's eyes were closed. Or were they? You never know anything for certain if you close your eyes. There is always this doubt, perhaps you are the only one following the instructions. But Salam Yousri, the Egyptian artist organising 'The Choir Project' and leading this workshop, said: Close your eyes, and start singing in your own language. It was the first day of the workshop, and throughout it we were exercising various activities of introduction and trust, such as writing a story about a complete stranger while sitting across from them, or standing in a circle, holding hands and making awkward noises. When I registered for the choir workshop, I didn't think that it

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[73] Hunter S. Thompson., *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.* New York: Modern Library, [1971]1996.

Thompson's blend of fact and fiction and autobiographical accounts became known as 'Gonzo Journalism', a satirical and socially critical first-person account in which the journalist becomes a protagonist and a participant, and which does not claim objectivity. The book symbolised the fall of the idealistic countercultural movement of the 1960s.

would be so physical and intimate. Or did I? Perhaps I chose the one workshop that scared me the most.

Anyway, everybody was chanting in their own language. There was English of course, German, some languages I didn't identify, and Arabic. Noticing the Arabic, I felt a strange lump in my throat. The voice inside me refused to come out. It asked: if I sing in Hebrew, will everyone brand me? Why should I immediately fall into the identity stereotypes that I so desperately try to avoid– especially in this detached environment, where I hoped my anonymity would allow me to be someone new. But then another voice said: Hebrew is part of you, and it has been around longer than you and your privileged fears. Trust yourself and the people around you. So I sang. It wasn't really a song, as we were asked to improvise. It was more like random words, shaky, unintelligible, and while I uttered them, tears came into my eyes. The Austrian woman next to me said: What is this language? It's beautiful. It's Hebrew, I said. Then the guy who sang in Arabic, let's call him M, asked: Where are you from? Tel Aviv. Where are you from? Ramallah. He smiled and said: Classic.

The Marathon

The *24/7 Political Strategies in Art and Artistic Strategies in Politics Marathon Week* was, as it was aptly called, very intensive. The curators took a participatory and performative approach in shaping the events of that week: they invited two hundred speakers and performers, but— in addition to the public that was invited as well—also a hundred artists and activists on a full scholarship, who were a sort of captive audience, but at the same time could create content spontaneously in the so-called Open Marathon. I was a part of this lucky group, affectionately nicknamed 'the dormitory people', since we slept in dormitories, while the official speakers got to stay in a hotel. The dormitories were actually very thoughtful, and like the entire compound were designed by raumlaborberlin collective. From a raggedy popup garden, where I rested in an alarmingly high hammock, to a rotating dance floor, which seemed to mirror the dizzy shape we were in, the camp's architectural inventions pushed the users outside of their comfort zone, but at the same time encouraged an intimate, reflexive, communal space.

The curators mentioned that we definitely didn't have to come to all the events, and we were welcome to create our own narrative out of all the possibilities. In fact, they stated that we were encouraged to miss quite a lot, and I remember this remark's significant calming effect. In a world in which one is pushed to a constant state of fomo, this seemed like an attempt to slow down and create an alternative system of subjective choices. Some of my own private highlights in the rollercoaster of political performance and performative politics were a talk by Antanas Mockus, the former mayor of Bogota who used artistic tactics to overcome violence, or Rabih Mroué and Lina Majdalanie's *30 Rounds and a Few Seconds*, a theatre show in which the only actors were technological gadgets, manifesting the absence of a Lebanese activist. But the collective experience that accumulated during this week was more than the sum of its

parts. It was about intensive encounters with artists and activists from all around the world, an ephemeral micro nation of like-minded, yet diverse and opinionated humans. As a sort of enhancing structure for the performative, political and participatory approaches of the projects featured during this week, the marathon provided a temporary shared reality for producing and exchanging knowledge in order to examine the role of artistic strategies during times of political turmoil. In other words, they were trying to say something in order for it to do something in the world, and not merely to reflect it (in a paraphrase of Austin's performative utterances).

The Meeting

Among the repeating elements during the week were collective meetings hosted by various speakers, aiming to provide reflection in real time and a platform for self-expression and criticism. These had continuity through generating 'missions' developed by groups of people with similar interests, thus incorporating a practical element to accompany the reflection.

My group decided that we should write our feelings on little notes and spread them around the compound. One of the group members was a Filipina woman, let's call her M. She wrote on her note: 'I don't whisper, it's everybody else who is too loud.' Or was this my own note? Anyway, after the groups reconvened, the meeting, hosted that day by Dmitry Vilensky from Chto Delat, seemed to divert from its path when a group of women claimed that there were not enough female speakers in the formal program of the marathon. In addition, they said that many women were afraid to talk, while some white men were too confident and took over the discussion. There was mention of a former meeting, in which certain people were practicing the Occupy movement's methods of collective decision making, that involved physical gestures determining who will speak and when. It was said that instead of using these methods to enable everyone

to feel safe and confident enough to participate, they abused it in order to assert the domination of Western men. There was much debate and no conclusion.

In the evening I went to sit in the bar. There was a rumour that Rabih Mroué was there, but he wasn't. And either way I probably wouldn't have dared to talk to him, fearing my identity would come up in the conversation. I did meet M. though, my Filipina friend. She told me that she had just been harassed by a group of drunken Austrian men, and that Western men always try to hit on her aggressively. Someone from the group of Palestinian artists, another M., but not the one from the choir, was sitting next to me. When the Filipina M. left, an Austrian woman joined us, wearing a Palestinian Keffiyeh. She asked each of us where we were from. Ramallah and Tel Aviv. Are you talking to each other? She seemed perplexed. Yes, we muttered. About politics? We don't have to talk about politics, M. said, we are politics.

The March

Several days after, the meetings culminated in a decision to initiate a collective protest march, led by Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir. The march was mainly to protest against a certain museum in Graz that was being sponsored by a bank that was collaborating with a polluting oil company. One should mention that the entire festival, of which the marathon was part, was also sponsored by the same bank, among others. This must have been difficult for the curators, but they didn't try to stop the action, which grew organically from the participants.

In the morning of the planned demonstration, everyone was drawing signs and preparing special protest accessories. Even though the main goal was to protest against the oil company, there were people with other agendas, and those were equally respected: brown bags to be put on heads in order to protests Graz's ban of homelessness; flyers of various activist groups to be

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distributed; and someone was wearing a tiger suit. At some point I thought that something bad happened as many people fell to the floor, but it turned out that they were only playing dead, practising nonviolent resistance in case they got arrested.

We walked along the river, led by the charismatic Reverend Billy, singing gospel protest songs. We got to the museum, and then someone threw oil that splashed on the clean white sofas of the museum. The museum security ignored us completely, and so we left. It was vegetable oil, but it looked real.

The End is Only the Beginning

During the last day, exhausted and exhilarated, our choir workshop ended and everyone went on stage, to sing a semi-improvised song, its words reflecting on the past week's event. I didn't join them. Something about going up on stage and improvising brought out all my fears, again. Maybe it was my resentment against doing what everyone else is doing. Or maybe I needed some rules in order to feel safe (is this a contradiction?).

The temporary community that was formed during this week, partly imagined and partly real, was by itself a sort of chorus, addressing the idea of expressing differences and individuality versus repetition and similarity. A choir, a polyphony of voices that embraces its members' differences, could idealistically refer to transnational alliances, without the unifying effect of globalisation. At the same time, it may recall a dystopian option in which inequality and distorted power relations inhibit solidarity. From this perspective, choirs become alluring instruments of false unification, which in fact deepen the gaps between their members by trying to suppress them.

Identities and power relations seem to have been a recurring subject in the interactions between the different participants in this 'production'. Was the macro world created in *Truth is Concrete* real or a theatrical stage? Were we

acting out our own identities, along with their built-in power relations, or did we manage to deconstruct them? Were we, as Judith Butler would put it, creating a deviant repetition, an enacted critique, that ruptured its prior conventions and formed our identities throughout the process? Did we come out different?

A choir, a meeting, a march and many of the other performative tactics taken up by the curators, created a multiplicity of voices, and undermined the sole authorship of a curator as it is commonly perceived. The format deliberately erased the borders between actors and spectators, while outlining certain structural 'rules', and at the same time encouraging a constant shifting and rearticulation of its basic assumptions.

The body, being so intensely entwined in all the activities—sleeping, dancing, eating, in some cases making love (not enough cases, people complained), being alert and sleep deprived at the same time, enabled an overcoming of the limitations of the mind. At the same time, the frustration and exhaustion created by the physical and intellectual intensity was always at risk of becoming a 'mirror or even a fulfilment of the neoliberal agenda of more and more, of extreme labour and permanent availability', as the curators wrote.

However, although the marathon week was not a utopia, and had its own inevitable blind spots, it provided a space for negotiation which enabled imagining new forms of solidarity. My own subjective marathon is only a fragmented account of the various ways in which the curatorial dramaturgy of *Truth is Concrete* enabled a performative and transformative experience, its seeds still growing. Perhaps this was—using a quote from James Loxley—an attempt to denormalise the body, to create 'a form of democracy that allows its participants to live a life politically, in relation to power, in relation to others, in the act of assuming responsibility for a collective future.'

5. The Voice in a Collective: The Crossover of Political and Artistic Utterings of Dissent

In the previous chapter, I examined the sphere of the voice as a dual, conflictual arena between the self and others, exemplified through the notion of deviant repetitions. This chapter will examine the agency of the voice within a collective, through formations of political choirs, both in the political sphere and in the artistic representational one.

Thinking of a choir as a dialogical formation allows me to relate to it via the participatory methods discussed in this thesis. This allows me to examine whether these formations entail a conflictual participatory engagement and enable diverse and multiple voices, both in the political and in the artistic representational realms. Scrutinising how a choir can provide a dual mirror through which the political power of the voice is reflected, I will exemplify how collective singing could invite identification. This identification could then be manifested either in the form of a homogenising nationalistic sentiment, consenting to prevailing myths, or as a dissensual aspiration for difference and for more democratic forms of governance. At times, both sentiments are expressed in parallel, further complicating the divide between obedient and subversive voices.

I will examine the formations of political choirs in the last decade, following the economic crisis of 2007–8, and as part of widespread protests that took various creative forms. I will look at how these formations seeped into the artistic sphere, aiming to amplify silenced voices as a counterbalance to the global rise of totalitarian and demagogic rulers. From musical performances in public squares to the museum as a public arena, I will continue my exploration of the significance of public space, and ask whether and how museums could function

in this way. At the end of the chapter, I will look at the exhibition *Preaching to the Choir* (2015), where my journey into the agency of the voice in the collective originally began. In the upcoming chapters, I'll delve into the relations between participation, collectivity and democracy through the meeting points between voices and bodies—the choreography of speaking assemblies.

5.1 The Choir as a Multi-Voiced Collective

As we have learned, a participatory project could be defined as one that creates a temporary community, either by working with a group that already defines themselves as a community around shared interests or attributes, or by creating a framework for the identification of a group of people. I have emphasised how layered and complex the term community is, and how difficult it is for both artists and curators to bridge the gap between an activist goal reflecting concrete needs of a community, and aesthetic and artistic intentions. One of the reasons for this difficulty is the nonhomogeneous nature of communities, whether they have existed before the project or have been constructed by it. Within any community, however one defines it, there is always a tension between the individual and the collective voice. Ignoring this tension would lead to a false sense of unification which could eventually turn into fascism and dictatorship, as we have seen through Nancy, Kester and others.

The format of a choir could provide an example of the tension between the one and the many—a collective structure which resonates individual voices within a group.

A choir is a musical ensemble of individuals singing in unison; different voices that together form a single, yet nonhomogeneous voice. It constitutes a temporary community that behaves according to a certain score. It asks its

members not only to make their voices heard, but also to listen very attentively to each other.

Many cultures boast historical choral traditions, involving various dialogic forms of collaboration or participation, such as call and response,[1] polyphonic choirs or improvisation with shifting vocal leadership. One of the ancient forms of choir that has the most influence on Western culture is the chorus of ancient Greek drama. It evolved from earlier Dionysian religious rituals,[2] particularly dithyramb

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[1] Call and response is a particularly relevant format for this analogy and for the characteristics of participatory art more generally. It is a musical formation that echoes a conversation—a musical phrase, expressed either with vocals or with an instrument, is being answered or repeated by different phrases. Its roots are mainly in Sub-Saharan African cultures, where it was used as a form of democratic participation in public discussions of civic affairs, in religious rituals and in musical celebrations. It had various manifestations in other musical traditions as well, such as folk, Latin, Cuban and classical, and in contemporary forms such as funk and hip hop. Call and response could express a question and answer, or a statement and a response to it, whether affirming or contrasting. It was used in order to engage more directly with a community, congregation, or audience. Often expressed as a verse sung by one person and answered by a choir, it was meant to enable a more intent form of listening and encourage enthusiastic participation. A unique feature of the African call and response is the overlapping of call and response and the use of polyphony and improvisation, resulting in a nonharmonious and nonhierarchal collaborative creation. Tilford Brooks, *America's Black Musical Heritage*, (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1984).

[2] For example: 'The performance of any ritual in tragedy is the encounter of the theatrical performance with the actual praxis of that ritual in the religious life outside the theatre. Recent studies of Greek religion reveal that descriptions of rituals in the tragedies are so elaborate and rich in performative components that scholars use

singing, but differed from these rituals as an independent medium and a tool for self-governing.[3] Already then, the chorus held political power by virtue of its momentous role as mediator between the actors and the audience, between the live human drama taking place on stage and the eternal myth underlying the tragedy.[4] It illustrated a multiplicity of voices and viewpoints within a hierarchical civil structure and reflected the meaning of being a citizen to the audience: the audience watched the actors, but at the same time was observed by the chorus that addressed it directly, and remembered that it, too, was a part of the same political sphere in which the protagonists operated.[5]

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tragedy (and comedy) as a reliable source of information for the reconstruction of the rites'. Nurit Yaari, '"What Am I to Say While I Pour These Funeral Offerings", Stage Image, Word and Action in Aeschylus's Libation Scenes', *Journal of Dramatic Theatre and Criticism*, (Fall, 1999), 50.

[3] Eli Rozik, *Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin, the Roots of Theatre*, (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2002), x–xix.

[4] This paragraph on Greek tragedy is inspired by a conversation I had with researcher Nir Shauloff, who was also a collaborator in two art works that were part of *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, a project I curated with Sarah Spies for *Reading: International* 2019 and on which I will expand later.

[5] Paul Cartlege wrote about the political importance of Greek tragedy in classical Athens, as it was staged by and for the polis of the Athenians, organised by the government. He mentions the combination of religious processions and rituals of sacrifice that made their way into the theatre alongside political ceremonies that were performed before the theatre. In addition, he mentions the importance of the tragic theatre to Athenians as part of their political education and for the understanding of democracy, a learning process in how to be active citizens and participate in open debates and acts of self-governing. He claims, through examples

The chorus in the Greek theatre was the voice of the writer, and simultaneously, the voice of the people; an entity that represented law and order, and at the same time indicated the possibility of their violation. The audience experienced the characters' deeds in a manner which created a sense of responsibility and rendered the other present, not via representation, but through identification and understanding. Thus, the choir constituted a communal space that breached the gap between theatre and 'real life', or between the artistic realm and the political. Hence, it is not surprising that choirs have played a major role in demonstrations and protests wherever processes of political change have shown themselves recently. Through the performative occurrence defining them, they call for solidarity, since they operate as a single body, yet make room for the individual voice within the crowd. They discuss specific local occurrences, yet call for collective responsibility that goes beyond geographical, religious, or ethnic boundaries. If we were to connect this back to the uncanniness of the voice, discussed in the previous chapter, an activist choir in this context could be seen as expressing a sort of collective unconscious or saying out loud what was repressed.

Choirs have evolved in different ways throughout Western history, often used for generating unification rather than to encourage a democratic polyphony, starting with church choirs as a vehicle for religious elevation, prompting obedience to religious laws. Dolar marks the French Revolution as a moment in which music and choirs stopped representing religious obedience and turned

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of various plays, that they do not only reflect preexisting political ideas but problematise and question them in a nondidactic manner. Paul Cartlege, 'Deep Plays, Theatre as Process in Greek Civic Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*, ed. P.E. Easterling, (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

into a common gathering of the people. However, despite good intentions, those were no less controlled, and became the bedrock of another form of power—state power.[6] In communist countries for example, singing was an important instrument for identification with the values of the regime and military songs were used for strengthening patriotic sentiments. In Israel singing groups and military choirs fostered identification with the values of Zionism, primarily the motif of sacrificing oneself for the land. There were also workers' choirs, used to raise morale and make people forget about mundane difficulties and social gaps.

Throughout history, choirs and collective singing were also used by marginalised and silenced communities as a form of creating solidarity and strength against an oppressive power. Perhaps the most notable example is the use of collective singing as a tool for social change by Black Americans, from spiritual and work songs during the time of slavery and the Civil War to the protest songs of the civil rights movement during the 1960s. This is an extensive study field of its own, and as the historical aspect of protest songs is not the centre of this research, I will not be able to do it justice. However, it is interesting to note the use of spiritual songs and labour songs before the Civil War, in relation to the emancipatory use of choirs in contemporary political artworks. The enslaved were not allowed to use any musical instruments,[7] for the fear that this would encourage revolt, or to openly sing words protesting

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[6] Mladen Dolar, 'The Object Voice', 24.

[7] Leslie Kimbazza Awassi, 'Music for the Emancipation of African Americans', (master's thesis, Université d'Angers, 2016–2017)

https://dune.univ-angers.fr/fichiers/20065204/20172MALLC7044/fichier/7044F.pdf
Accessed 30 May, 2023

slavery, discrimination and violence. However, spiritual songs were allowed as a form of religious expression, conceived as harmless venting that could prevent revolt, and labour songs were favoured as they were thought to increase productivity.[8] Thus, these two song formations, both sung collectively, became the main outlets for political sentiments. Most spiritual songs included words that protested in an indirect way, for example using the plight of the Israelites in Egypt as a metaphor for transforming from slaves into free people.[9] Other forms of coded communication in spiritual songs were used directly to plan escape from slavery.[10]

Work or labour songs included more direct references to traumas and abuse, as the improvisation and dialect allowed the singers to express themselves without the risk of being understood by their oppressors.[11] Thus, the Black American poets, musicians, and even clergymen, used the only form of creative expression they were allowed, to encourage resilience and revolt instead of compliance and productivity. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s,

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid. See also Edna M. Edet, 'One Hundred Years of Black Protest Music', *The Black Scholar*, vol. 7, no 10, Black Bicentennial (July–August 1976).

[10] As abolitionist Harriet Tubman guided Black people to freedom along the Underground Railroad, she sang certain spirituals to signal it was time for escape. Among Tubman's favourites was reportedly 'Swing Low, Sweet Chariot'.

Thad Morgan, '11 Anthems of Black Pride and Protest Through American History', (23 June, 2020) *History*, retrieved: https://www.history.com/news/black-music-slavery-protest

[11] M. Edet, *The Black Scholar.* Accessed 30 May, 2023.

protest or freedom songs again had a significant part in sending messages of revolt and calling for social change.[12]

The call and response musical formation, mentioned earlier, was in common use in work songs, and played an important part in developing a sense of agency and encouraging protest. For enslaved African American women for example, it was a discursive improvisational strategy to create communal identity and a shared narrative in diaspora.[13] As I wrote before, since the slave owners could not understand the hidden messages, the songs were a form of resistance. In the case of the women, they were sometimes sung in situations where only the women were working together, away from the eyes and ears of men.[14] However, as most work songs were sung in public, it was still risky. Another form of protest song for African American women was lullabies, sung intimately and privately to their children, enabling a freer expression of the traumas of slavery, as well as a way to preserve oral traditions in an environment that demanded them to hide their heritage.[15] These were not

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[12] Leslie Kimbazza Awassi, *'*Music for the Emancipation of African Americans*', 7–8.

[13] Gale P. Jackson, 'Rosy, Possum, Morning Star: African American Women's Work and Play Songs: an excerpt from *Put Your Hands on Your Hips and Act Like a Woman: Song, Dance, Black History and Poetics in Performance*', *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 46, no. 8, (November 2015).

[14] Jacqueline Jones, 'My Mother Was Much of a Woman: Black Women, Work, and the Family under Slavery'. *Feminist Studies*, vol. 8, no. 2, Woman and Work (Summer, 1982).

[15] Ibid., Wikipedia, s.v.'African-American Women Work Songs', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African-American_women_work_songs Accessed 30 May, 2023.

merely a performance but a form of pedagogy through testimony.[16] I will return to both forms of female protest songs, the collective labour songs and the intimate lullabies, via the case studies that I will examine in the upcoming chapters.

A popular claim is that protest songs have also had a unique part in the revolutions of 1989, towards the fall of the Eastern bloc. Again, this is a vast and complex historical moment that I will not be able to survey here, but I would like to give a few pertinent examples that involved live political and performative assemblies: in the case of Berlin, concerts which turned into demonstrations, and in the case of Estonia, demonstrations which turned into concerts.

The Berlin Wall has been famously touched by the power of protest songs; an early example is the concert given by East German musician Wolf Biermann in 1976, who performed in West Germany, after which his citizenship was revoked due to the political nature of his performance. This unleashed a series of protests, which are considered to have kicked off the citizen opposition to the East German communist regime.[17] Another instance in which a musical performance supposedly encouraged the fall of the Berlin Wall was the concert of Bruce Springsteen in 1988, a year before the wall fell. Western Music was first banned in East Germany as it was considered decadent, a propaganda of the West to distract the youth from politics. However, after realising they couldn't control the exposure of the youth to popular music, the East German government lifted the ban, and some musicians were allowed to perform in East

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[16] Gale P. Jackson, 'Rosy, Possum, Morning Star', 775.

[17] Susanne Sproer, 'How a 1976 Concert Shook the Berlin Wall', *DW.COM*, (4 November, 2019) https://www.dw.com/en/how-a-1976-concert-shook-the-berlin-wall/a-51064239 Accessed 30 May, 2023.

Germany. Springsteen, who included a political speech in his concert, sold one hundred and sixty thousand tickets, but around one hundred thousand more stormed the gates before the show despite the presence of East German police.[18] It is tempting to look at this breaching of borders between East and West, as a preenactment[19] of the breach of the Berlin Wall a year later, which led to its fall. Finally, there is the peculiar case of American actor David Hasselhoff, who recorded the song 'Looking for Freedom' in 1988, an English version of a German song from 1978. The song became a hit in Germany and a symbol of a possible united German future. Hasselhoff performed it at the Brandenburg gate about a month after the fall of the wall, in the first New Year's Eve party of the new Germany (December 31,1989),[20] as a sort of uncanny manifestation of Western pop culture on speed appropriating a political revolution.

One of the most prominent and unique examples of choral traditions used for activist purposes at the time was Estonia's 'Singing Revolution' (1986–1991). Estonia has been under a foreign regime many times throughout its history;

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[18] Erik Kirschbaum, 'Who brought down the Berlin Wall? It might have been the Boss', *Los Angeles Times*, (4 November, 2019), https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2019-11-04/how-rock-n-roll-shook-east-berlins-core-and-the-wall Accessed 30 May, 2023.

[19] I will return later to the term 'preenactment', coined by Oliver Marchart following Dana Yahalomi from Public Movement, and explain it further.

[20] Olivia B. Waxman, '"I Was Just a Man Who Sang a Song About Freedom": 30 Years Later, David Hasselhoff Looks Back on His Surprising Role in the Fall of the Berlin Wall', *Times,* (7 November, 2019), https://time.com/5714602/david-hasselhoff-berlin-wall-fall/ Accessed 30 May, 2023.

after World War II it was again occupied by the Soviet Union, who banned any Estonian nationalistic sentiment such as raising the flag or singing folk songs, attempting to assimilate the Estonians into the Russian culture. Many Estonians however refused to be assimilated and used their cultural heritage to create a nonviolent protest movement that eventually brought the Russian occupation of Estonia to an end, as well as that of fellow Baltic countries, Latvia and Lithuania.

Estonians used their large-scale traditional cultural festival as an arena in which banned nationalist songs were sung, together with new rock and pop songs contributed by contemporary musicians. [21] Eventually the massive cultural protest gained the support and collaboration of the Estonian Communist Party, which separated itself from Russia and declared independence in 1991. After a failed coup in Russia, it accepted the independence of Estonia, followed by Latvia and Lithuania. Interestingly, this protest made direct use of nationalistic patriotic songs by the citizens—instead of a government using patriotic songs to encourage loyalty, the citizens were using them to create a sense of hope and solidarity, and invited the government to join them in undermining an occupying force that attempted to assimilate and erase their identity.[22]

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[21] Thousands of people assembled in these festivals, singing the songs together, holding hands; in 1988, around three hundred thousand Estonians, a quarter of the population in the country, sang together in a song festival in Tallinn. In 1989, seven hundred thousand people held hands across borders in the three Baltic states, in what became known as the Baltic Chain.

[22] Stephen Zunes, 'Estonia's Singing Revolution (1986–1991)', CNC International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, (April 2009) https://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/estonias-singing-revolution-1986-1991/ Accessed 30 May, 2023.

Jacques Attali[23] observes that musical structures typical of a given time and place can anticipate and prophesy historical and political developments. They not only reflect the social formations of their time, as maintained by Theodor Adorno and Max Weber before him; the reciprocal relation between music and political events can foreshadow future occurrences. It can indicate new, liberating modes of production, while introducing a dystopian possibility, which is a mirror image of that emancipation.[24] The notion of art anticipating politics, or politically prophetic art, relates to Oliver Marchart's use of the term 'preenactment',[25] which I will focus on in the next chapter.

Diverting from the activist into the artistic realm, choirs were used in various artistic media throughout modern history, in a manner reminiscent of the self-reflexive complexity of the Greek chorus; accentuating the dual power of collectivity to both embrace and undermine hegemony, they allude to the emancipatory prophetic potential described by Attali, where an artistic performance of revolt could invite its reenactment in the real political sphere. From Brecht's epic theatre to cinematic musicals, such choirs produce estrangement, deviating from the dimension of illusion and fantasy and calling for critical observation; they suspend the everyday to raise questions about the human condition. A self-reflexive duality is thus at the choir's core: on the one hand, it reflects the alluring power innate in a manifestation of uniformity; on the other hand, it enables the imagining of a new, more democratic political system. However, these are not opposing ends, as the same collective

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[23] Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music.*

[24] Fredric Jameson, 'Foreword', in Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 10.

[25] Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics.*

solidarity, which is needed to start revolutions, is precisely what underpins the nationalist imaginary. This tension, between a dystopian accentuation of the unbalanced power relations of past and present, and imagining a utopic communal future, is at the heart of this research, and returns throughout the theoretical examinations and the works exhibited in the various projects.[26]

5.2 If I Can't Sing, Is This Not My Revolution? Assemblies as Protest

Curatorial and artistic projects in the form of an assembly or a gathering, with related debates around collectivity and commoning (a term which I will further expand on in the next chapter), have become more present in the last decade. Often the boundaries between conference and protest, choir and demonstration have been further blurred. These practices are anchored in the political overhaul of 1989 and the art-historical turn it engendered, as well as in the performative artistic practices of the 1960s and 1970s.

Claire Bishop named 1989 'The Social Turn';[27] the year signified a turning point and was a catalyst for the rise of socially and politically engaged art. Artists responded to the fall of the Eastern Bloc, the acceleration of capitalism and the corresponding rise of antiglobalisation movements with a critique of the

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[26] Fragments of the texts in this chapter were written for the catalogue of *Preaching to the Choir*, an exhibition in Herzliya Museum of Art, Israel, and edited and incorporated into the research. Participatory projects involved choirs as a political voice, via videos, performances, workshops and events. Artists: Chto Delat, Effi & Amir, Zeljka Blaksic, Irina Botea, Omer Krieger and Nir Evron, Luigi Coppola, Marco Godoy and Tali Keren (catalogue, 2015). Curator: Maayan Sheleff.

[27] Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn, Collaboration and its Discontent', *Artforum*, February 2006, 179–185.

postsocialist, all-encompassing neoliberal economy and its unifying and numbing effects. During the late 1990s and the early 2000s, these tendencies correlated with a surge in video art and with a blurring of boundaries between art and activism and between documentary and fiction, as seen for example in the seminal *Documenta 11* (2002, curated by Okwui Enwezor and others).

Nato Thompson described these developments as 'social aesthetics'—responding to capitalism by emphasising the participatory and the social as a reaction to the alienation and numbness encouraged by media and culture making. He connected the developments of the late 1990s and early 2000s to the genealogy of the situationists in the late 1960s and their critique of the culture industry, manifested in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle*, [28]which later gave birth to tactical media[29] with the establishment of the interventionist Critical Art Ensemble in 1987. In the 1990s, these new social aesthetics were coopted more and more into capitalist culture and the advertising industries, so that art found itself merely reenacting economic hegemonies rather than interfering in them.[30]

In the late 1990s, a vast politically-involved network of protest movements was temporarily united against globalisation and the cooptation of social practice by capitalism, infusing new life into the intermingling of art and activism,

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[28] Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle.*

[29] Defined by Critical Art Ensemble as an interventionist form of guerrilla cultural production that could disturb specific political structures. See: Nato Thompson, *Seeing Power, Art and Activism in the 21st Century* (NY/London, Melville House Publishing, 2015), 20.

[30] Ibid., 8–21.

manifested in demonstrations and interventions in the public sphere.[31] In this period, neosituationist methods developed,[32] including tactical media and its successor, culture jamming.[33] Artists and artist collectives interrupted public

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[31] Thompson marks the years between 1999 and 2001 as the peak of this movement, which was inspired also by the ideas in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's book *Empire*: 'In the two years between the battle of Seattle and the attack on the world trade center, activism erupted into a global community of political resistance. From the Seattle WTO meeting in 1999, to the World economic forum in Davos and the International Monetary Fund protest in Prague in 2000, to the battle at the summit of the Americas in Quebec city, the EU summit in Gothenburg, Sweden, and the bloodied streets of Genova during the G8 Protests in 2001, social and cultural activism movements grew ever more connected.' Thompson, *Seeing Power*, 22.

[32] Gregory Sholette also mentioned the situationists as the main inspiration for tactical media artist- activists such as Critical Art Ensemble or the Yes Men. Sholette, 'Art Out of Joint: Artists' Activism Before and After the Cultural Turn', 75.

[33] These were led by artists such as the Yes Men duo and Billionaires for Bush, who impersonate corporation leaders; the Institute for Applied Autonomy, Natalie Jeremijenko, Yomango and RTMark who developed websites and applications for activists and robots to spray paint slogans; Reverend Billie and the Stop Shopping Choirs who preach nonconsumerism; the band Le Tigre who sang their way out of the internet and into the streets; Surveillance Camera Activists; Carnival against Capitalism with their spontaneous street parties, and the pink bloc with their choreographed routines in protests and their distribution of feminist literature.

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space both physically and in the popular media and internet, mostly with vocal and choreographic collective manifestations of protest.[34]

This blossoming of global protest ended, at least in the context of the US according to Thompson, due to disenchantment with electoral politics after Bush was elected with a tiny advantage in voter numbers, and due to the attack on civil liberties during his regime—after 9/11, 'protest' was translated into 'terrorism' and oppressed violently. While artist-activists like the Yes Men were reorienting their practice, forms of the antiglobalisation movement and DIY protest became popular in mainstream hipster culture and coopted to encourage consumerism. Other forms of activism started developing in the margins, concerned with locally specific issues of the privatisation of public space, gentrification, immigration and sustainability, and finally, a decade later, culminated with the Occupy movement and its concern with taking back the spaces, both literally and metaphorically, which were taken over and controlled by hypercapitalism.[35]

The new surge of participatory, political, and performative practices of the last decade seems to have been triggered by the economic and political crisis beginning in 2007–2009. This crisis in the US and in Europe[36] along with the

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[34] Thompson, *Seeing Power*, 8–21. One should note that Thompson writes mostly about artists in the US.

[35] Ibid., 23–25.

[36] The financial crisis of 2007–2008 was a severe worldwide financial crisis, related to extreme risk taking by banks in the US leading to the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers and followed by an international banking crisis, and a European debt crisis, which began with a deficit in Greece in 2009, both sparking a global recession,

ongoing political conflicts in the Middle East were followed by upheavals in many parts of the world which peaked in 2011, termed the Occupy movement, the Social Justice movement, the Arab Spring and others, depending on their location. With various occupations of the public sphere in Tel Aviv, Istanbul, Madrid, New York and many other places, the movement was mostly protesting international financial policies and economic injustices.

Gregory Sholette noted that the economic breakdown of 2007–8 was affecting the precarity of artists and cultural workers. In conjunction with the 'virtual proletarisation' of cultural workers, as well as increasing surveillance and persecution of activists, artists became uncertain of their political agency. As institutional critique led to no substantial change in both real and art world politics, direct 'acts of embodied resistance' began to reemerge, as an opposition to the art world's 'entrepreneurial political economy'.[37] This recent wave of upheavals is similar to the great upheavals of the 1930s and the 1960s in terms both of their resulting from extreme political and economic circumstances, and enacting solidarity with and between populations at risk, but with a major difference in the apparent absence of an alternative to capitalism and the doubt in the ability of art to instigate change.[38] However, as in previous protest movements, artists took important roles in the upheavals, with demonstrations functioning like performances and performances turning into demonstrations, many of them with voice-choreography manifestations.

which, until the coronavirus recession, was the most severe recession since the Great Depression.

[37] Sholette, 'Art Out of Joint: Artists' Activism Before and After the Cultural Turn', 85–86.

[38] Ibid., 89.

To name a few pertinent examples in the Western context: La Solfónica in Madrid was an open collective of singers and musicians formed in the wake of the 15-M protests in Madrid (2011) for the purpose of performative activism. They distributed lyrics in demonstrations and engaged the public in their orchestral performances in the public sphere. In Russia, the feminist punk-rock performance group Pussy Riot (founded in 2011), staged guerrilla performances in public locations, edited them into music videos and distributed them online.[39] In the US, the media hacking group Billionaires for Wealthcare (established in 2010) used performative demonstrations as well as YouTube sing-along clips to protest the American healthcare system. Another prominent example is New York-based Reverend Billy and the Stop Shopping Choir, a travelling radical performance community that sings gospel protest songs as public interventions, which became involved in the Occupy protests in New York. They respond to ecological issues as well as to social and economic injustices, preaching anticonsumerism and care for planet earth.[40]

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[39] Pussy Riot focused on LGBT rights and their protest was directed against the regime in Russia and its ties to the Russian Orthodox Church. The collective became globally famous in 2012 after a concert in an orthodox cathedral ended in the arrest of some of the group members; they were accused of 'hooliganism motivated by religious hatred', and two of them were sent to jail for two years and released earlier after a global public outcry. See for example here: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25490161 Accessed 30 May, 2023.

[40] The group was formed as early as 1999, but became very active in the Occupy movement, which they say has 'rebirthed the radical landscape in NY'. They responded to the economic crisis by singing in bank lobbies and corporation buildings as early as 2007, and after the Occupy movement focused on climate care.

While these collectives utilised the blur between art and activism to promote their message in an engaging performative manner, other essentially performative manifestations of collectivity took root directly within activist movements; they were used as methods for communal and democratic expression, without any artistic or aesthetic claims. The practice of 'human microphone'[41] for example utilised the multiplicity of human voices in unison as a tool of political empowerment, whereby a message is called out and repeated by the crowd as a form of amplification. This was a practical solution since the use of megaphones was illegal, but also protected the individual speakers from being identified and arrested.

An example of a related call and response vocal activism, somewhere between a human microphone and a choir, occurred before the aforementioned protests, in 2009: commonly referred to as the 'Iran roof singing protest', it involved people who were forbidden to protest in public, shouting and singing to each other from roof to roof, mostly words of praise to Allah as a form of protest against the totalitarian regime. One person would start, and others answered, like a chain reaction. Hiding in the darkness of the nights, the callers were unseen by the authorities. The roofs, the border between the private and the public realm, were liminal spaces that allowed for a slightly less dangerous collectivity.

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https://revbilly.com/about/ Accessed 30 May, 2023.

[41] The term the 'human microphone' was first used in the antinuclear protests in the US during the 1970s and 1980s, and later in the 1999 Seattle WTO protests, but has attracted attention due to its use in the Occupy Wall Street movement. I will write more about it later on.

In Italy, about a decade later, during the Covid-19 pandemic, people were singing and making music together from porches, another liminal territory between the public and the private sphere. As movement was curtailed and the public sphere became a forbidden territory for assembling, collective forms of expression needed to find a different viral dynamic. In Israel, protest against the government continued in various forms during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the curtailing of movement was used as an excuse to silence it, but the protest found different forms by continuously moving instead of assemblies in one place. Thus, performative utterings of collective protest were manifesting themselves in public space, attempting to invite economic and political changes, which are still lagging behind.

Another performative phenomenon of the last decade, often embodied in voice-based performances, was the occupation of museums, specifically drawing connections between corporate funders and the institutions' public roles. For example, during the Occupy movement protests in New York (2011), a submovement of Occupy formed and called itself Occupy Museums. The movement, led by artists, identified a direct connection between the corruption in 'high finance' and the corruption of 'high culture'. In the following years, groups that aimed at intervening in corporate events or protesting corporations' sponsorships of major art institutions increasingly took the form of choirs. For example, the British group of singers, musicians and activists Shell Out Sound, which intervened at events at the Southbank Centre—one of the UK's major cultural institutions—with surprise group singing in protest of Shell's sponsorship of the institution (2013).[42] They sang against arctic drilling,

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[42] See for example here: https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2013/mar/01/shell-music-protest-south-bank Accessed 30 May, 2023.

fracking and climate change, bringing the stories of communities impacted by Shell's operations to the fore. Also in London, performative activist groups like Liberate Tate, Rising Tide and others joined forces to create the Art Not Oil Coalition (2015).

5.3 Echoes of a Revolution

All these tactics put new emphases on notions of solidarity, community, and equality, and relayed themselves to a wide audience through documentation posted and shared online. The internet is considered to have had a major impact on sparking the political upheavals in the Middle East and North Africa known as the Arab Spring[43] (2010–2012). Protesters disseminated images and videos and managed to bypass censorship, transfer information between activists and raise worldwide awareness. The common mode of dissemination for 'art' and 'activist' messages was thus further blurred through its often similar online presence. However, the use of the internet has raised and continues to raise questions today, regarding the safety of protestors, as surveillance and censorship methods online are constantly becoming more efficient, and the collaboration between the private corporations that manage online platforms and governments is constantly tightening. In addition, the way algorithms are used to increase consumerism, as I specified before, results in the repetition of certain content only for audiences who seem to respond to it. In that sense, documentation of performative protests would most likely be circulated among

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[43] The Arab Spring was a series of antigovernment protests, uprisings, and armed rebellions that spread across much of the Arab world in the early 2010s. It began in response to oppressive regimes and a low standard of living, starting with protests in Tunisia.

artistic and activist communities of common interests. Thus, the question remains whether they will manage to infiltrate other types of crowds and challenge contradictory perceptions, or, like the virtual echo calling Narcissus on the social networks endlessly in vain, they only reinforce existing concepts and self-adornment. Do we merely preach to the choir?

I would like to look at the term 'echo' here, and how it was framed through the story of Echo and Narcissus, from a dual perspective. For the first I'm borrowing Frances Dyson's definition of a virtual echo, as a reduced resonance without political agency. Dyson writes about the shallow echo of social networks: 'Resonance—with its attributes of sympathy, empathy, and common understanding—is reduced to echo: the shallow repetition of the loudest voice. In this day and age, the loudest voice does not necessarily represent the common people, it does not resonate with their wishes, nor engage with their demands, but responds to the markets, to currency trading, flows of money, bond rates, and credit ratings'.[44]

In her book *The Tone of Our Times*, Dyson examined the sound, tone and voice in systems of ecological and economic governance in crisis, alongside the potential of forms of sonority in their subversion.[45] She described the qualities of the voice as reverberating and repeating in a manner that is not countable and thus is not neoliberal. The collective voice, or the voice of the commons, comes in opposition to the individual who is only represented by his or her financial debt. At the same time, Dyson looked at the technological forces which undermine these potentialities of the voice; as the open space of public debate is transferred from physical space to the space of media,

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[44] Dyson, *The Tone of Our Times, Sound, Sense, Economy, and Ecology*, 2.

[45] Ibid.

which she refers to as a 'space without people', it becomes mediated by technology with its regulated acoustic walls.

Dyson explored various historical moments and artistic and theoretical practices that describe the establishment of the control of space and sense, economy or ecology through sound, and how they reflect practices of exclusion. At first, she established the connection between forms of religious governance and economic ones, claiming that in the same way that governance was installed historically through the amalgamation of theological and political power, it is currently being installed by the amalgamation of political and economic power. In some of her following case studies Dyson looked specifically at the human voice and attempts to computerise and analyse it in both artworks and research labs, in order to quantify, define and simulate affect. She showed that with each technological advancement, the mediated voice lost its affect in the process of eliminating noise. In favour of defining a clear transmission of meaning, voice might be accumulated, analysed and codified, for example through algorithms, but it loses its qualities as sound and becomes mere data.[46] She asked, when both speaking and listening are instrumentalised, how is affect being generated? Surveillance, as she described it, is 'amplifying a form of autism in the next generation of software'.

Echo, according to Dyson, was destined to only repeat the words of another. Dyson related the chatter associated with social media to older notions of gossip or hearsay, describing meaningless or unfounded speech. She attributed the new association of

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[46] Ibid., 42–46, 69–91.

electronic chatter, with its threats to national security, to a sonic manifestation of extreme governance during an economic and environmental crisis. Alternatively, she offered the noise of demonstrations and riots, as part of a physical, nonmediated act of occupying and reclaiming the commons via the voice of the people, as puncturing power structures:

> The physical act of occupying and reclaiming the common, then, developed a new sense, a new way to make sense, and to make sense of the current crisis, and the spacing, pausing, and listening involved in and produced by the people's microphone is an articulation of this common. Its echoing punctures, or inserts a comma, a pause, in the covering up of power. Its silence denotes a silencing, and its repetition is the insistence of echo—that voices will be heard and speech passes on.[47]

Dyson differentiated between the virtual echo, which she considered shallow and reductive, and an embodied echo of physical presence. In the physical presence of occupying a space, and particularly in the repetitive practice of the human microphones, she found another kind of echo that according to her rearticulates the commons.

Collective protests that include assemblies and occupations are often perceived positively, at times even idealised by the political theorists, artists and curators, as I elaborate throughout this thesis. However, some voices reflect the complexity and duality of an embodied experience of collectivity. Ulrike Bergermann[48] described her contradictory experience of participating in

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[47] Ibid.,17,146–155.

[48] Bergermann, 'Un/Easy Resonance, the Critical Plural'.

protests by the Occupy movement, particularly in regard to the practice of the human microphone. Looking at the characteristics of the Occupy movement, Bergermann emphasised two main tendencies: the first was the denial of a list of demands, and the second was a consensus-based decision-making process that aimed to include as many participants as possible in a nonhierarchical manner. These trades were admired by many as a successful form of enacted direct democracy, for example by the activist-anthropologist David Graeber who was one of the initiators of the protests in Wall Street and coined the term 'we are the ninety-nine percent'[49] or by theoretician Slavoj Žižek who worked closely with the movement. In relation to the lack of precise demands or hierarchical leadership, Žižek said that 'the vacuum within the hegemonic discourses should not be refilled too early in order for something really new to emerge.'[50] However, the movement was also criticised by many, among them Bergermann, who described her embodied experience as unsuccessful in terms of enabling a consensual, equal, collaborative expression.

Bergermann presented an in-depth analysis of the practice of the human microphone, mentioning several researchers that explored the subject, among them Oliver Marchart,[51] who discussed it via Jean Luc Nancy[52] and Sylvie

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[49] David Graeber wrote about his experience with Occupy Wall Street in *The Democracy Project: A History, a Crisis, a Movement*, (London: Penguin, 2014).

[50] Bergermann, 'Un/Easy Resonance, the Critical Plural',106.

[51] Oliver Marchart, *Die Prekarisierungsgesellschaft: Prekäre Proteste* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013).

[52] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*.

Kretzschmer's[53] research on how public address systems of amplification silence certain voices. In that regard, Bergermann's position on the human microphone's potential to encourage diverse voices is layered: on one hand, she questions the simplicity of the messages, and the act of imitative repetition, and asks whether it indeed opens new modes of thinking. On the other hand, she suggests that the performance of the human microphone, as a process of hearing oneself and the other speaking, postpones political positioning via the pauses between repetitions, and in that sense encourages stepping out of one's preconceptions. She mentions Jeremy Woodruff who examined musical parameters of the tone of the voice in the human microphone and considered the languages and words conveyed to be less important than the nature of sound in political struggle. In that regard, the human microphone turns into a 'sonic tool moving between unison (harmonies, repetition, sameness) and dissonance (alteration, difference). While identically embodying a message, there is, at the same time, a critical distance from the source voice, measurable difference in the process of dissemination and invention.'[54]

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[53] Sylvie Kretzschmar, 'Verstärkung – Public Address Systems als Choreografien Politischer Versammlungen', in *Versammlung und Teilhabe: Urbane Öffentlichkeiten und performative Künste*, ed. Regula Valérie Burri, Kerstin Evert, Sibylle Peters, Esther Pilkington, Gesa Ziemer (Bielefeld: transcript, 2014), 143–167.

[54] Jeremy Woodruff, *A Musical Analysis of the People's Microphone: Voices and Echoes in Protest and Sound Art, and Occupation I for String Quartet*, PhD thesis, University of Pittsburgh, Dept. of Music, 2014, 142.

5.4 Echoing With a Difference

The concept of echoing with a difference receives a poignant twist in Gayatri Spivak's 'Echo'——her take on Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo from a feminist postcolonial perspective. Criticising what she calls the generalising and racist Western psychoanalytic and philosophical perspective of Freud and others, which relates narcissism mostly with women and non-Western cultures (or as they called them 'primitive people'), Spivak writes:

> This chapter is an attempt to 'give woman' to Echo, to carve her out of traditional and deconstructive representation and (non)representation, however imperfectly, and remember that 'women's work' is the model aesthetic education——to borrow and anticipate the speech of the other.[55]

Spivak reminds us that Ovid's tale deals with sexual difference and violence through his description of crimes and punishments. The chain of punishments that led to the story of Narcissus and Echo had to do, according to how Spivak interprets Ovid, with denying the gaze and limiting the voice in order to withhold woman's ability of self-expression, whether verbally or sexually. In Spivak's rendition, Tiresias was punished by being turned into a woman, after he saw two serpents mating and killed them. Later, he became a man again, after he deliberately repeated the act. Since he experienced being both man and woman, he was asked to settle an argument between Jupiter and Juno, where he supported Jupiter's claim that woman had more sexual pleasure. Juno was angry and punished him with blindness, but he was compensated by Jupiter with clairvoyance. Tiresias's story coincided with that of Narcissus and Echo

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[55] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Echo', in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (Cambridge, Massachusetts/ London, England, Harvard University Press, 2012), 218–240, 218.

when Narcissus's mother, a nymph who was raped, asked Tiresias if her child, born as a result of the rape, would live to be an old man. Tiresias said this would happen only if he did not know himself. The nymph Echo met Narcissus only after her ability to express herself freely was taken away from her as a punishment for deliberately distracting Juno with mindless chatter while Jupiter had sex with other nymphs. Echo's punishment was to only be able to echo someone else's words. Together with Tiresias's punishment, withholding the gaze and silencing the voice have become a way of blocking woman's right to knowledge (vision) or to self-expression (whether through voice/speech or through body/sexuality). When juxtaposing Tiresias's story with that of Echo and Narcissus, Echo's punishment also seems to contradict Tiresias's claim that woman have more sexual pleasure, because she supposedly represents the ultimate unfulfilled passion to the other, as a question which cannot be answered, or a void which cannot be filled.

However, Spivak argues that Echo's punishment failed, and in fact turns into a reward, because her repetition was not merely imitation, and had a meaning of its own; her voice marked a difference which disclosed the truth of self-knowledge to Narcissus, since his fascination with the gaze prevented him from knowing himself.[56] Instead of adhering to being silenced, Echo found a way of producing knowledge even though she was trapped in conditions that supposedly prevented her from doing so.

At the same time, there is still a tragic aspect in Echo's condition, in Spivak's interpretation. Her reward is dubious, as the (self-)knowledge that she produces is not meant for her, but for Narcissus. The story of Echo and Narcissuses ends with death, but in this death, there is a complex intermingling

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[56] Ibid., 220–226.

of the permanent and the ephemeral: Narcissus is lost in his own gaze and turns into a flower. The flower is ephemeral, but it is still. Echo's body turns into stone, but her voice continues to echo. The stone is fixed, but her echoing is infinite. Is this a Sisyphean endless resonance of another, or a reverberating knowledge that keeps developing? Or, if we think again of repetition in relation to the notion of preenactment, perhaps we could think of it like this: While Tiresias's reward is clairvoyance—the ability to see the future, a sort of double-edged reward as he cannot change what he foresees—Echo's so-called punishment is in fact the true reward, as she can echo the present in a manner which invites the future that she imagines.

If we take this back to the realm of activism via the practice of the human microphone, we can see the political potential of echoing rather than its limitations, connecting back also to Butler's notion of deviant repetitions. Echoing with a difference, as a form of participatory curating, would be the echoing of the knowledge that an artist produces, which is by itself the echoing of the knowledge of a community. The difference that the curator produces is the manner in which he or she chooses to navigate, mediate and contextualise this knowledge. I'm not implying here that artists are narcissists, or that the act of curating withholds some absolute truth. I'm rather commenting on a certain schism between the curatorial voice as authority of knowledge, and curating as mediation, which could be rendered through Echo's repetition with a difference. In the context of the complex human relations that participatory curating entails, as discussed in previous chapters, echoing with a difference is also a form of preenacting the future relations that we want between one another, and between us and the world.

Felix Ensslin defined the curator as an analyst, in relation to what Foucault has called 'the will to know', or to the signification of 'serious speech acts' as a way

to exclude those who are not authorised to speak.[57] In other words, curating is power, exercised as a mode of action upon the actions of others. He refers to Lacan's rendition of the impossible unification between the imaginary and the symbolic (which I explained in relation to Nancy in the first chapter), and the lack that it produces, as a clinic or praxis: that praxis, which he compares to curating, is the elaboration of knowledge, or a symbolic working-through of something real. This truth is always partial, not the imaginary unification but a subjective truth that is never totally presentable, that speaks to its own lack of totality. The praxis or the clinic is a practice that works through meaning 'to realize a measure of what is, within meaning, signified as impossible.'[58] This impossibility, suggests Ensslin, appears as a resistance to the circulation of meaning in democratic consumerism, or to the need to mediate a resistance to the 'narcissistic recognition of being recognized rather than answered'. Thus Ensslin offers curating as the possibility of opening a space for a reflexive awareness of what is impossible within the relationship between practice and the articulation of its meaning through writing or speaking about it.

Returning to Spivak, she compares Echo to an analyst who repeats certain words of a patient in order for the patient to understand something. In that regard, she turns the familiar power relations on their head—instead of the weak, helpless victim who struggles to express herself, Echo becomes the carrier of knowledge and possible cure. However, Echo's echoing of difference is unintentional according to Spivak. She is the unintending subject of ethics

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[57] Felix Ensslin, 'The Subject of Curating – Notes on the Path towards a Cultural Clinic of the Present', *OnCurating*, No. 26 / Curating Degree Zero Archive: Curatorial Research, (October, 2015) 19–33.

[58] Ibid., 29.

manifested through the voice, while Narcissus represents aesthetics through the infatuation with the gaze. In relation to Echo's death, Spivak relates the separation between her voice and her body to the relation between language and writing—a separation of a mark from its origin.[59] Going against the notion of needing to advance from the imaginary to the symbolic (via Lacan) she suggests perceiving the self as 'writing' and 'male' and the symbolic as 'feminine', in order to dislocate Lacan's geometry of the gaze.[60]

5.5 Case Study: *Preaching to the Choir*

The human microphone and the choir are both assemblies of collective voicing. However, although some characteristics ascribed by Bergermann and Dyson to the human microphone are relevant to choirs as well, such as the democratic formation in which participants can lead or follow, singing in a choir involves more difference and variations. Thus, participating in a choir requires intent listening to others in order to take an active part in the layered sound that is being created simultaneously and collectively. For that reason, choirs have served as a starting point for me to examine conflictual participation as an assembly that encourages political criticality.

My curatorial project *Preaching to the Choir*[61]was based on a vast survey of art works that involved choirs in political contexts. As the name suggests, the

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[59] Ibid., 227.

[60] Spivak, 'Echo', 237.

[61] *Preaching to the Choir,* Herzliya Museum of Art, Israel, 2015. Artists: Željka Blakšić´ aka Gita Blak, Irina Botea, Chto Delat, Luigi Coppola, Effi and Amir, Nir

exhibition took a reflexive, sometimes ironic look at the impact of political art on the real world, rather than taking a naive optimistic stand. As a curatorial tactic, it aspired to open opportunities for shifting the power relations between artist, curator, institution and audience, through performative assemblies that made use of the museum space, while at the same time showing works that reflect on these problematic relationships. Eventually, several performative live projects were cancelled, some for budgetary reasons and others because of disagreements between the artist, curator and institution, ironically enacting behind the scenes the conflict they intended to reflect to the audience.

The live performances that did happen were the Sacred Harp group led by Noam Enbar, and an opera workshop led by Luigi Coppola. Both were participatory and performative workshops that involved the audience in creating content that responded to the exhibition. The Sacred Harp was a group that was already meeting independently, singing gospel music, sometimes with contemporary words that they had written. Their improvisational method, in which each session was conducted by a different member of the group, was intended to be read in the context of the exhibition as a performative embodiment of democracy. However, the performances gained an added twist of institutional critique—as the choir was singing gospel songs within a museum space, amongst the artworks, this ironically reflected on the perception of museums as temples. While the work presented itself as participatory not only for the choir members but to whoever wanted to join in, most people who unintentionally stumbled upon the performance did not join in. I assume that this was expressing a certain fear of avant-garde art despite

Evron, Marco Godoy, Ilir Kaso, Tali Keren, Omer Krieger, Elie Shamir. Curated by Maayan Sheleff.

the democratic premise, as well as uncertainty regarding whether this was a performance, workshop, or a cult that had invaded the museum. In addition, the Sacred Harp group usually performed amongst themselves and not in front of an audience; thus it felt more like a rehearsal. In conjunction with the Christian religious content, the work gained another antagonistic layer, causing confusion amongst the mostly Jewish audiences.

These mixed emotions were enacting and embodying the gaps between participatory intentions and the reception of an audience used to passively viewing art in a museum, as well as embodying the tension between political utterances and their artistic representations, reflected in many of the other works in the exhibition. Between the plans for various participatory workshops and performances, and the reality of their alteration or cancellation, the exhibition took the main stage in a more dominant manner than I had planned. Ultimately, in the balance between accentuating the limits of exhibition formats in terms of enacting political agency, and the attempt to generate spaces for this agency in a museum, a tension that the exhibition wished to maintain, the odds leant towards the accentuation of the problematic rather than to pointing out an alternative.

The exhibition itself delved into projects from the last decade by artists who worked with choirs, presenting them through films and video installations. A series of videos that I 'curated' from the internet, showing activist choirs in the public sphere, were shown in the museum lobby, welcoming the visitors as a sort of exposition. The works included in the exhibition involved collaborative or participatory artistic processes with singers, musicians, writers and activists. As aforesaid, the chorus in the works represents both the voice of the sovereign and the voice of the people; it reflects laws and order, and at the same time indicates the possibility of their violation. As the works facilitate a new type of collectivism, they also echo a grimmer possibility, whereby inequality,

economic gaps, and distorted power relations encumber civil solidarity, and in which the choir serves as an instrument, via its strong performative affect, in deepening the gaps.

The works juxtaposed representations of the individual with perceptions of the collective in relation to various socialist traditions. Some of them attested to the transformation of these concepts following the collapse of the Communist bloc and the disillusionment with the utopian view of cooperative life. At the same time, the works reflected the current crisis of Western capitalism, which extols individuality, but in view of the uncontrollable expansion of globalism and growing economic gaps, in fact has flattened and trampled the individual. Both these political structures—communism and capitalism, with all their obvious differences—erase the distinctions between the unique entities comprising society. As Frederic Jameson wrote in regards to Jacques Attali, whose theory about the prophetic political agency of music I mentioned before:

> No organized society can exist without structuring differences at its core. No market economy can develop without erasing those differences in mass production. The self-destruction of capitalism lies in this contradiction, in the fact that music leads a deafening life: an instrument of differentiation, it has become a locus of repetition. [62]

Repetition was a dominant element in many of the works in the exhibition, but as I've explained before, this was the subversive repetition described by Butler,

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[62] Fredric Jameson, 'Foreword', in Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, 17.

Marchart or Spivak, rather than the numbing, oppressive repetition of the capitalist assembly line of Dyson or Benjamin.[63]

Interestingly, Attali's text was written in 1985, several years before the collapse of the Communist bloc. Since then, the countries of the bloc have absorbed capitalistic influences; today some of them tend towards totalitarianism, and power is concentrated in the hands of small nationalistic interest groups. Israel too, a state with a socialist-idealistic past, shows signs of totalitarianism in a hypercapitalistic system of privatisation. These relations between a socialist dream gone awry and a capitalist present, and their implications for notions of collectivity, become apparent through the works in the exhibition. The deliberate clashes between the language and the music, the repetitions and the differences, the collaboration and its discontents, the rehearsals and the failures, come not only to emphasise past and present challenges, but to imply different futurities.

The dual potential at the choir's core, for enacting democracy or inviting despotism, is present not only in the work's content but in its creation processes as well. The artists reflect upon their processes as a negotiation of differences that manifests the difficulty of creating a solidaric community unanimous in its goals. They externalise their role as outside onlookers, as participants, or as disruptive foreigners. My curatorial position was to echo the artistic intentions of sounding a conflictual polyphony, while emphasising what happens to these iterations of participation as they enter exhibition formats and institutional spaces. On the one hand, how the art institution, by taking a political performance from the real sphere into the representational, and fixing it in time and space, is at risk of nullifying its political impact; on the other hand, how a

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[63] I will return to the notion of subversive repetitions later.

reflexive use of repetition and rearticulation can still charge the museum with the tension of a real public sphere. Treating the exhibition as a score that unfolds in space and time, I attempt to unfix meaning and disable myth. The exhibition then becomes a sort of Brechtian musical: its narrative is an embodied experience in space, where the works are performative moments of estrangement that resonate the political subconscious of the museum.

The artists in *Preaching to the Choir* attempted to examine and deconstruct preconceptions of nationality, via the fusion of local musical traditions with contemporary texts. Temporal and contextual shifts produced new combinations of tune, text, and place, which also manifested in the visual aspect of the works. The works link the artistic-aesthetic with activist-political spheres, and relate, at times directly, to protest movements, by reappropriating texts from the 'real' political sphere—demonstrations, economic blogs and legal documents—into the artistic representational sphere.

The element of echoing and repetition with difference was evident in all the works, in several ways: the shifting of texts from their original political context (whether it was hegemonic or subversive and activist) into the realm of the exhibition, where they were repeated and reperformed; a repetition of choreographic gestures and vocal verses in looped videos, rendering the exhaustion of content like an endless rehearsal with no beginning or ending; and the rearticulation of textual content (judicial, economical, sociopolitical) in a visual manner, implying a contested relationship between the camera-eye and the voice-mouth.

5.5.1 *Preaching to the Choir*: The Works[64]

The exhibition consisted of mostly video and performance works, but it opened with a lone painting, Elie Shamir's *Lullaby for the Valley*.[65] Five young women singing in a choir are depicted in a ploughed field, and next to them, a man playing the accordion. Doron Lurie identified a dual tension in this painting, and in the polemic of Eretz-Israeli painting in general, 'one arising between idealistic-utopist description and mimetic-realistic description; and another arising between a moral judgment of the situation's failure and the need and wish for education, propaganda, and expressions of identification.'[66]

Similar tension arises from many other works in the exhibition, which carry, as aforesaid, the dual political potential of choral singing: as a text which elicits identification with uniform national values, and as a signifier of their future deconstruction via protest and revolution. The eternal and the mundane, as well as the conflicts embodied in them, are presented side by side, reflecting the reality of life for the viewer, just like the tragic heroes in Shamir's paintings. They are imprisoned by their fate in the landscape of their homeland, which is bruised and scorched along with the utopian ideals of their ancestors.

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[64] There is one work missing from this rendition, Željka Blakšic´ aka Gita Blak's '*Whisper-Talk-Sing-Scream*, as it was also shown in the frame of the project *(Un)communing Voices and (Non)communal Bodies*, which is discussed as the next case study. I preferred to write about the work in that context rather then here.

[65] Elie Shamir, *Lullaby for the Valley*, 2008, oil on canvas, courtesy of the Asher Kugler Collection. Elie Shamir, b. 1953, Kfar Yehoshua, Israel; lives and works in Kfar Yehoshua.

[66] Doron J. Lurie, *Elie Shamir: On the Road to Kfar Yehoshua*, trans. Tamar Fox (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2009), 169.

Lullaby for the Valley was inspired by Renaissance artist Piero Della Francesca's *The Nativity* (1470–75). Baby Jesus, however, is absent from Shamir's painting, which features the members of the previous generation in Kfar Yehoshua—his parents' generation—who, he maintains, sacrificed the raising and fostering of their children for the ideal of pioneering labour. The women's choir sings Nathan Alterman's 'Song of the Valley' (1934), a song of hope, labour, and sacrifice. Unlike the pathos characterising the customary rendition of the song by singing groups, however, Shamir's choir is antimonumental, solitary in the landscape. The women's attire is modern, and one of the singers appears to be a migrant worker. The contrast between myth and reality alludes to the contrast between the imaginary text, with which the viewer, at least in the local context, is familiar, and the sombre realistic landscape. Moreover, the freezing of the moment in the painting blocks the feelings of love for the land, which the song was meant to invoke had it been heard. The painting thus becomes a melancholic elegy for a patriotic fantasy.

Rehearsing the Spectacle of Specters,[67] the title of Omer Krieger and Nir Evron's 2014 video installation, are the opening words of a poem by Anadad Eldan (b.1924), member of Kibbutz Beeri on the Israel-Gaza border. Eldan— the 'kibbutz poet', who wrote texts for kibbutz ceremonies and festivals—is also a renowned, widely published lyrical poet in Israel. His poems have a unique sound based on rich and musical ancient Hebrew. The video documents a

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[67] Nir Evron and Omer Krieger, *Rehearsing the Spectacle of Specters*, 2014, 2-channel HD video installation, 10mins, looped. The work was originally commissioned by The Art Gallery, Kibbutz Be'eri, curator: Ziva Jelin, assistant curator: Sophie Berzon Mackie. Nir Evron, b. 1974, Israel; lives and works in Tel Aviv. Omer Krieger, b. 1975, Israel; lives and works in Tel Aviv.

group of kibbutz members reciting the poem in 'Beit Ha'am', the people's assembly hall; it is, however, a digital choir of individual figures grafted one on the other, morphing into each other, as if not managing to be individual subjects but also failing in creating an embodied collective presence. The reciting choir is juxtaposed in the video with footage of the Kibbutz's gathering areas and public stages, which were used for collective expression, but they are all completely empty of human presence. This studio-assembled choir, which is cut off from the real public space depicted in the work, accentuates rather the inability to create a common text. It thus generates a dystopic contemporary image of the kibbutz, a formation that started out as a radical social experiment, manifested through the architecture of communal life and the performativity of togetherness. Disguised as a tribute to the poetics of shaping society by the state, this work, like Ellie Shamir's painting that was mounted next to it, is a lament for a utopian socialist dream gone awry.

Marco Godoy's *Claiming the Echo*[68] (2012) offers a transition from the local to the global, serving as a second exposition for the exhibition. It features the Solfónica

Choir, founded in Madrid during the 15-M protest to sing in demonstrations. Godoy relocated the choir from the public sphere to an empty theatre hall and situated

it in the traditional place of the audience; there it sings protest slogans that were popular in the demonstrations, relating to the economic crisis in Spain. The songs, composed especially for the work (by Henry Purcell), were later added to the choir's repertoire, and it continues singing them in street demonstrations.

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[68] Marco Godoy, *Claiming the Echo*, 2012, single-channel HD video, 5min 25secs, looped. Marco Godoy, b. 1986, Spain; lives and works in London and Madrid.

This work also conveys tension: on the one hand, it indicates the danger in aestheticising protest practices following their appropriation to a sterile artistic space; on the other hand, it hints at the positive potential innate in the diffusion of these practices from the museum back to the public sphere, implying that the link between musical structure and text, or art and activism, may generate new options.

Chto Delat's *A Tower: The Songspiel* (2010) [69] is the concluding chapter of a trilogy of critical musicals, the first of which addressed perestroika, and the second, the partisans in Belgrade. This chapter, also based on real life events, tells the story of a corporation which suggested building a skyscraper in St. Petersburg. The tower was marketed as a symbol of modern Russia and raised objections among city residents. In the musical, several choirs of concerned citizens (workers, old people, young girls, human rights activists, etc.) perform protest songs at the foot of a symbolic tower where a group of stakeholders (the corporation's CEO, a politician, a priest, a gallery owner, and an artist) gather, singing their way to capital and power.

The battle between the protest choirs and the 'elite' choir calls to mind the two channels in which choirs may function: either as a sweeping spectacle of demagogy (anchored in the communist past, but manifested in neoliberal rhetoric), or as a medium for protest and civic rebellion. The satirical aspect of

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[69] Chto Delat, *A Tower: the Songspiel*, 2010, single-channel video, 37 min, looped. Chto Delat (in Russian, 'what is to be done?') collective was founded in 2003 by a group of artists, critics, philosophers, and writers from St. Petersburg, Moscow, and Nizhny Novgorod with the goal of combining political theory and activism in art, and it aims for critical politicisation of information. Its members frequently incorporate singing, while referring to Russia's political reality and history.

the work is directed not only at the authorities, but also at the protesters themselves, who fail to reach agreement regarding their messages, and literally get tangled in a web of red cables.

In *Before a National Anthem* (2010),[70] Irina Botea presents a collaborative process of writing a new anthem for Romania. A choir performs various works written and composed by Romanian poets and composers whom the artist approached, which combine texts proposed by hundreds of Romanian citizens who accepted the challenge. The camera documents the choir performing the new 'anthems', lingering on the singers' faces, as the rehearsals transform into negotiations between text and music.

When the choir discusses the lyrics and tune, it inevitably discusses the meaning of the process itself, deconstructing it into formal and thematic elements. The work elicits questions about various perceptions of nationality and notions of community and collectivism, exploring the feasibility of a common narrative. The long and complex rendition of multiple anthem variations exhausts and undermines the very possibility of a single anthem that articulates a coherent national narrative, juxtaposing it with a polyphonic alternative. The future anthem heard in the work lacks harmony, since we are faced with a pre-agreement state; but it is precisely the discord and conflicts between the individual and the collective that give rise to the possibility of a more democratic future.

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[70] Irina Botea, *Before a National Anthem*, 2010, single-channel video, 78 min, looped. Irina Botea, b. 1970, Romania; lives and works in Bucharest and Brierley Hill, UK.

Luigi Coppola's video *On Social Metamorphosis* (2012)[71] attempted to create a new language that would loudly resonate some of the new concepts born during the social justice protests in 2012. The artist collaborated with other artists as well as singers and comedians, formulating a utopian manifesto, which they speak together as a choir. The manifesto was inspired by Paul Jorion, a journalist who created an influential platform for discussion of the economic, political, and social climate in Europe. Following the economic crisis, Jorion and a team of intellectuals created a think tank, and called upon citizens to suggest ideas by which to formulate principles for a new society. Coppola's choir tied together declarations from the blog with quotations from leading figures who affected economic developments, such as Saint-Just during the French Revolution, British economist John Maynard Keynes, or the New Deal's Franklin Roosevelt. These texts are a manifestation of what Coppola terms a contemporary 'virtual choir'—the collective voice of the 'people' as it comes across over the digital realms. At the same time, the work intentionally makes use of aesthetics reminiscent of the Greek chorus as the participants wear what look like voice amplifying masks made of financial newspapers. As the hand-holding choir repeats the financial texts in a zombie like intonation, the work sends what seems to be a deliberately ambiguous message, reminiscent of the Greek choir's reflexive relation to citizenship and power; it amplifies, but at the same time questions, the sort of power this digital protest choir entails, asking whether it can resonate into a real sphere of solidarity and change.

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[71] Luigi Coppola, *On Social Metamorphosis*, 2012, single-channel video, 13 min, looped. Luigi Coppola, b. 1972, Italy; lives and works in Brussels, Belgium, and Lecce, Italy.

5.5.2 Focus: Tali Keren and Effi & Amir

Looking at curating as echoing the practices of artists, I would like to emphasise the relation of my curatorial practice to some of the artists that I maintain a fertile dialogue with, in this case Tali Keren and Effi & Amir who both participated in *Preaching to the Choir*, both of which I'll return to in the next case studies. While there are other artists whose practices are deeply relevant to this thesis and who have participated in more than one case study, I focus on Tali Keren and Effi & Amir, and later on the collective Public Movement, because their identity as Israeli (or formerly Israeli) is relevant to how they render and instigate nuanced antagonistic methodologies of participation. I should stress that while for Public Movement the issue of their own national identity is on the surface and communicated directly through their work, with Tali Keren and Effi & Amir it is more overt and not something that they would necessarily describe in this manner. While Tali Keren employs seductive playfulness and a touch of over identification, Effi & Amir approach their subjects with what they call 'empathic vulnerability'. However, both use participatory and collaborative methods, while questioning their ethics and flirting with the antagonistic; both develop long term research subjects and at times act as secret agents or investigative detectives; both examine forms of storytelling and testimony and employ methods of listening, developing intimacy in unpredictable places. Most importantly, both express discomfort with authorship and power.

Tali Keren has been living in New York in recent years. Her work *New Jerusalem* (2015),[72] from when she was still based in Israel, was a research

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[72] Tali Keren, *New Jerusalem*, 2015, 2-channel HD video installation, 20 min, looped. Originally developed during a residency by Keren in the municipality of Jerusalem, in

project that developed into a 'bureaucratic musical performance' at the monthly meeting of the Jerusalem City Council, when a cantor sang parts of the codex of the municipal outline Plan 2000 to the mayor and council members. The plan, which was never authorised but is nevertheless implemented in situ, is the first plan drafted in Jerusalem since the 1967 occupation and the annexation of East Jerusalem; the document refers to a 'united' Jerusalem and describes it as the capital of the 'Jewish-democratic' state. By combining two types of appeal to the public—a religious ceremony and an administrative document—the performance draws attention to the content of the plan, which consists of legal language intertwined with messianic rhetoric. It thus exposes the routine expression and impromptu implementation of a charged ideology.

The video, documenting the performance at the City Hall, is presented on a hanging double-sided screen. The ceremony documented in the video seemed to have evolved without special drama, despite the charged content of the song; satisfied council members are seen sipping wine or fondling their cell phones, while students invited to see the performance seem to be on a scale somewhere between boredom and amusement. The other side of the installed screen features text captions sung by the cantor, and next to them comments by various responders, coming from opposing sides of the political map.[73] Their

the frame of Under the Mountain Festival, Culture Season Jerusalem. Tali Keren, b. 1982, Israel; lives and works in New York.

[73] Efrat Cohen-Bar, Director of Planning and Community at Bimkom—Planners for Planning Rights, who filed the administrative petition against the plan, Yair Gabai, former member of the Jerusalem City Council and the District Committee for Planning and Construction, among the most prominent right-wing objectors to the

comments reflect the multiplicity of viewpoints in this charged space, as well as how a supposedly objective and dry document could be interpreted in several ways.

The work brings up questions regarding the activist or emancipatory potential of works that explore the territory of antagonism and overidentification. As I discussed in the first chapter, these kinds of projects become interesting when their approach is layered and could cause confusion and embarrassment. However, as this case shows, while the work could be read and interpreted as critical, the governing institution that experienced the original performance, and towards which much of the work's criticality was aimed, seemed to regard it as a flattering reflection of its power; instead of realising that the artistic residency in the municipality was a Trojan horse, they attempted to appropriate the art and 'recruit' the artist to their service.

When Tali Keren and I were discussing this aspect of the work, she suggested holding a conference in response to the documented performance. Eventually we decided to add the responsive comments as part of the installation, to emphasise the polyphony of conflicting narratives as an inherent part of the work in its cinematic iteration. The new installation strengthened the work's criticality without losing its ironic edge or becoming too didactic. It became a rearticulation of a rearticulation, taking into consideration the heterogeneity of audiences who would read the work in retrospect. While some might understand the work as giving a stage to the right-wing fetishism of Jerusalem, others will read it as exposing the problematics of a legal document that shapes

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plan, and Eli Jaffe, the messianic composer of the eponymous piece, 'New Jerusalem', written especially for the project.

the fate of many, and is used for oppressing and discriminating against Palestinians.

Tali Keren has in recent years focused on evangelist narratives and their relation to the Israeli occupation. The uniqueness of her work is that she manages to shed a new light on prevailing myths. She does so by making people participate in her work in a manner that disrupts colonial imagination and confronts them with their complicity and hypocrisy, no matter on what side they are on. The playfulness and appealing aesthetic imagery contrast with their content which foregrounds the disturbing seductiveness of ethno-national populism. She acts like a secret agent who infiltrates the enemy lines, but she also listens to this 'enemy' without judgement; her listening exposes narratives that are not always in plain sight, and precisely because she doesn't didactically claim who is good and who is bad, her works have a transformative potential for their participants and viewers.

Effi & Amir's 2015 cinematic installation, *Skcolidlog and Other Inversions*,[74] which premiered in *Preaching to the Choir*, was made in collaboration with the Albanian artist Ilir Kaso, Albanian poet Krenar Zejno and the iso-polyphonic choir Ensemble Cipini, who wrote all the texts for the film. It was shot in deserted private houses in ex-communist Albania, a country which remained almost untouched by Western influence until the 1990s due to its totalitarian regime. Following mass immigration to European countries that were perceived as more successful economically, many houses under construction in Albania

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[74] Effi & Amir with Ilir Kaso, *Skcolidlog and Other Inversions*, 2015, 4-channel video installation, 32 min, looped. Effi Weiss, b. 1971, Israel; Amir Borenstein, b. 1969, Israel; have worked together since 1999, live in Brussels. Ilir Kaso, b. 1982, Albania; lives and works in Tirana.

were deserted. In this two-dimensional dystopian landscape of concrete skeletons, the artists shot a modern allegorical version for the fairy tale *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*.

The plot unfolds in the breached liminal space of the empty house where the artists operate possibly as guests, presumably as hosts, and seemingly as ghosts. Like in a Greek tragedy, an Albanian iso-polyphonic choir (beginning with one lead singer and continuing with additional voices joining in), which is heard but not seen, sings the unconscious narrative that lies beyond the visible: the texts, written solely by the Albanian collaborators and based on interviews with locals, respond to the artists' uninvited invasion.

The act of reverse immigration by the artists, coming from Belgium to Albania––from a place regarded as representative of Western affluence to a place seen as destitute and deficient––critically inquires into the status of artists as privileged foreigners, short-term migrants who come to collaborate with the local community. This fragmented collectivity is enacted in several ways. Firstly, through the choir's uncanny disembodied voice, which, as I have explained before via Freud and others, resonates a sort of political unconscious of a local collectivity, in this case concerned with this artistic narrative's blind spots; secondly, a local girl interrupts the artists and directly confronts them, as if enacting the impossibility of a consensual collaboration; finally, an externalisation of the cinematic means of production, manifested in surreal moments such as the illusion that the artists are floating in midair, undermines and exposes its illusionary nature to imply the pretend power of these ephemeral occupiers. The artists make their reply through cinematic methods, by exposing the apparatus, as they don't speak (having given the agency of speech to their collaborators).

Effi & Amir don't define their work as participatory per se but more as strategies of weakening authorship, out of discomfort with the power position that comes

with the perception of the genius artist (which was also their starting point for collaborating as a duo). In addition, they resist definitions and clear-cut perceptions of identity, starting from their own identity as Israeli. They emphasise that their main interest is not in 'giving voice' to someone else but in destabilising their own position. Whether through a neighbourhood museum that they set up with residents, experimenting with putting aside their artistic agenda,[75] or through asking collaborators to write the script such as in the case of *Skcolidlog and Other Inversions*. The inversion of the roles of hosts and guests, tourists and locals, artist and community, externalised in *Skcolidlog* through the concept of reverse immigration, is a repeating element in their work. It is a process of learning from local knowledge and resonating with it, while reflecting on the limitations of a oreign artist's point of view.[76]

Effi & Amir create platforms from which they look for common ground with their collaborators, and in which those collaborators can intervene within a predefined set of rules.[77] In this process, things happen that are sometimes out

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[75] Effi & Amir, The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum, 2016, https://www.effiandamir.net/index.php?id=228

[76] Some examples of other works of the duo are *A Hypothesis Of A Door* (2021), *Chance* (2020) and *Jessy Cooks* (2012).

See: https://www.effiandamir.net/index.php?id=2

[77] In the case of Effi & Amir I alternate between the terms collaborators, participants and protagonists to describe the people who take part in their works, because the level of agency and authorship they have shifts between one project and another. In addition, the artists like to think of the participants as collaborators, while I prefer to define them as participants because they are not signed as the authors of the work, and their interventions are within a predefined set of rules created by the artists, a

of their control, producing a shift from how the artists might have imagined the work originally. Thus, these processes are a form of embodied research through art making, where the artists insert themselves into the situation as a method of learning rather than to produce some prefigured plan, enabling a fragility that is crucial to their work. In order to be honest with their inquiries they feel that they should risk themselves rather than putting others at risk, even if just symbolically.

Having a clear set of rules to which the protagonists, participants or collaborators consented, understanding the aims and conditions of the work, is important for the artists. Exposing the fabrication of the work as a controlled set, and accentuating the decision-making process, allows a transparency and honesty in the dialogue with both participants and viewers, making the work ethical rather than manipulative. At the same time, I would claim that it is still antagonistic since it emphasises and exposes the violence inherent in acts of documentation (this is most evident in their work for *Voice Over* which I'll discuss in the next case study), while enacting that same violence, albeit in controlled, safe conditions. Thus, their practice offers a unique example of how antagonistic participatory art could be ethical and caring rather than manipulative or offensive.

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method that communicates what Claire Bishop defines as participatory directed reality.

Curator: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 20. The Solfónica Choir performing Claiming the Echo in a demonstration against cuts in social services, Madrid, 2012. Photo: Marco Godoy.

Fig 21. Marco Godoy

Claiming the Echo (2012), Single-channel HD video, 5 min 25 sec, looped, installation view in *Preaching to the Choir*, Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo: Maayan sheleff

Fig 22-23. Tali Keren

New Jerusalem (2015), 2-channel HD video installation, 20 min, looped,
installation view in *Preaching to the Choir*, Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo:
Maayan Sheleff

Fig 24-25. Željka Blakšic aka Gita Blak

Whisper–Talk–Sing–Scream (2012–2013), Single-channel video installation, 8 min, looped, still from video and installation view in *Preaching to the Choir,* Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 26. Effi & Amir In collaboration with Ilir Kaso

Skcolidlog and Other Inversions (2015), 4-channel video installation, 32 min, looped, installation view in *Preaching to the Choir,* Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 27. Albanian Polyphonic Choir Ensemble Çipini during recording. Photo: Effi & Amir

Fig 28. Chto Delat

A Tower: The Songspiel (2010) , Single-channel video, 37 min, looped, installation view in *Preaching to the Choir,* Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 29. Luigi Coppola

On Social Metamorphosis (2012), Single-channel video, 13 min, looped, still from video

Fig 30. Nir Evron and Omer Krieger

Rehearsing the Spectacle of Specters (2014), 2-channel HD video installation, 10 min, looped, installation view in *Preaching to the Choir*, Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 31. Irina Botea

Before a National Anthem (2010), Single-channel video, 78 min, looped, installation view in *Preaching to the Choir,* Herzliya Museum, 2015. Photo: Maayan Sheleff
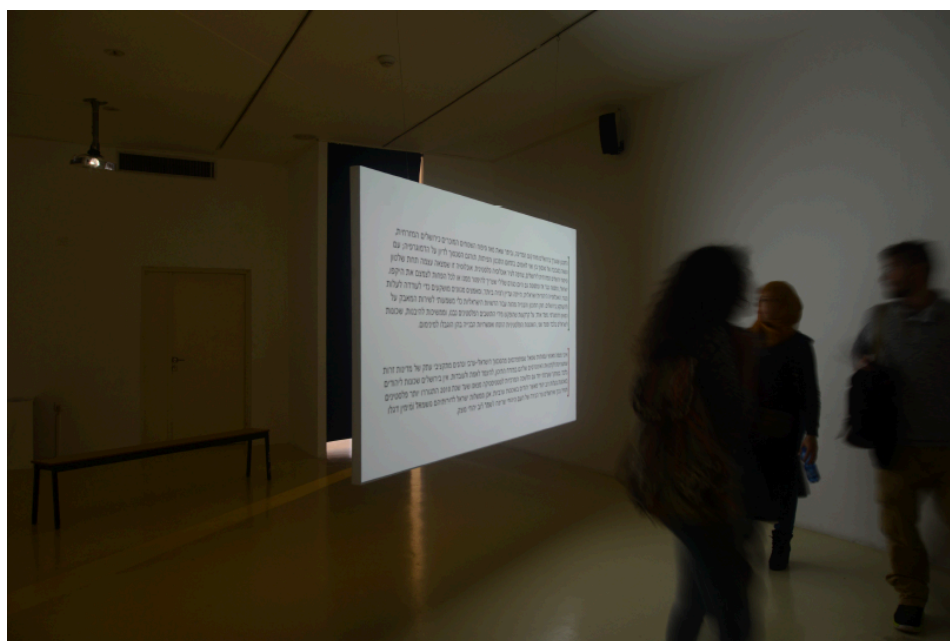
6. (Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies/ Speaking and Moving Assemblies in Times of Crisis

As examined in the previous chapter, at the heart of this research stands the voice's dual potential as both an authoritative homogeneity generator, and a subversive tool for encouraging multiplicity and difference. This duality is exemplified through various participatory curatorial acts that invite and generate fragmented forms of commoning as speaking and moving assemblies. Chapter 6 will delve into another case study from my own curatorial practice, *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies.*[1] In each of these case studies of practice-theory entanglements, a different emphasis is made on notions of collectivity and methods of participation; while in *Preaching to the Choir* the discussion centred around collective vocal iterations as performative testimonies, here the body and its choreography

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[1] *Un)Commoning Voices & (Non)Communal Bodies*, participating artists, speakers, and writers:

Zbyněk Baladrán, Željka Blakšić, Susan Gibb, Marco Godoy, Chto Delat/Dmitry Vilensky, Noam Inbar and Nir Shauloff, Jamila Johnson-Small/Last Yearz Interesting Negro and Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome, Mikhail Karikis, Tali Keren, Florian Malzacher, Public Movement, Michal Oppenheim, Rory Pilgrim, Edgar Schmitz, Jack Tan, Nina Wakeford, and Katarina Zdjelar. Curated by Maayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies. The project included two parts: Part #1:ZHdK, Tanzhaus-Zürich, 2 and 3 of November, 2018, Part #2: as part of *Reading: International*, UK, in various spaces and locations around the city of Reading: Open Hand Open Space, St. Laurence Church, Greenham Common Control Tower and the University of Reading, 23 April–2 June, 2019.

come into the fore. Choreography as a form of ordering of the subject, as well as a potential tool of dissent, corresponds with the duality of the voice as discussed previously.

As in the cases of *Preaching to the Choir* and *Truth is Concrete*, the works cast a reflexive, critical gaze on the role of artists in participatory practices and on notions of homogenic collectives and essentialist identities or communities. In this chapter, I will discuss various implications and manifestations of the term 'commoning' in relation to the project, as inviting participation and collectivity but at the same time allowing refusal. I will connect these notions to forms of subjugated and situated knowledges in relation to embodied practice and research discussed in previous chapters. I will continue to look at the reciprocal amplification between the curatorial and artistic concepts and methods, as well as how these relations serve as a critical framework for the exploration of institution-curator-artist-participant relations. Examining uncommoning as a curatorial strategy will lead to a definition of conflictual curating as preenactment, mediating and echoing antagonisms in order to invite futures that emphasise care, nonracist and nonviolent listening practices, while leaving room for differences.

6.1 Case Study: *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*

(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies, curated by Dr. Sarah Spies and myself as part of Reading:International,[2] (Reading, UK, 2019)

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[2] The project in Reading included an exhibition and several workshops and participatory performances, all part of Reading:International 2019. Reading International is Reading's contemporary visual arts organisation. Led by artists from the Reading School of Art at the University of Reading and hosted by a mix of

included a series of workshops, performances and an exhibition, interrogating the relationship between participatory artistic practices and protest via the performative scores of collective bodies and voices. The project juxtaposed the research areas of Spies and myself, creating various correlations between studies of the voice and theories of the body via the politics of performativity. We questioned political and social engagements organised around a common 'score'——where the score is seen as a way of arranging collective movement––and asked how a score emerges from bodies and voices in communion and potentially complicates a collateral understanding of power and agency.

The first phase of the programme started with a series of talks and workshops in November 2018 led by curator Susan Gibb, curator and dramaturge Florian Malzacher, artist Dmitry Vilensky/Chto Delat, and choreographers and dancers Jamilla Johnson-Small (or Serafine1369, previously known as Last Yearz Interesting Negro) and Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome at the Zürich University of the Arts and Tanzhaus Zürich. The second phase took place within the Reading:International festival between April and June 2019 and included works by Zbynek Baladrán, Željka Blakšic, Marco Godoy, Mikhail Karikis, Tali Keren,

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Rory Pilgrim, Jack Tan and Katarina Zdjelar alongside a newly commissioned 'training' by Public Movement, workshops led by Noam Inbar, Nir Shauloff and Michal Oppenheim, and a performance at the Greenham Common Control Tower by Nina Wakeford.

The third phase was a publication of the same title,[3] which included texts by Susanne Clausen, Susan Gibb, Edgar Schmitz and a conversation with Florian Malzacher and Jonas Staal. The Covid-19 pandemic struck at the beginning of 2020, while we were working on the publication, and the response to it around the globe seemed to enhance and complicate many of the issues that we were addressing. Social distancing measures were issued, mass surveillance further silenced communities that were already marginalised, and increased border closures added additional limitations to an already threatened freedom of movement. Far-reaching social protests have spread globally, demonstrating against governmental failures to deal with the crisis and the increasing violence that was inflicted upon vulnerable communities, among many other issues. Often these protests were suppressed with more violence. The viral choreography was in a state of flux, with some countries continuously moving in and out of quarantine and enforced social distancing measures threatening the physical collectivity of bodies.[4] Whilst the texts in the publication were being written, we were already looking back at the project from within the pandemic's

[3] Maayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies eds., (*Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies* (Zurich: OnCurating.org,2021).

https://www.on-curating.org/book/UnCommoning-Voices-and-NonCommunal-Bodies.html#.Y6f3suxBxQI

[4] In some places around the world, such as China, complete lockdowns have been in place for over two years now (late 2022).

viral choreography and responding to the ongoing crisis within a wider timely context.

As I'm writing this thesis, it seems that the world is still trying to grasp and comprehend the constantly changing reality, as bodies and voices continue to infiltrate and shift borders, and new alliances are arising. When I worked on the project as a co-curator, I could not have imagined the multitude of new meanings that unfolded in its aftermath— some related to the forced distancing of bodies and to the further silencing of marginalised voices, others to the simultaneous performative enactment of solidarity as a sensorial activist response. The precariousness of embodiment was brought to the fore; my engagement with the silencing of the voice and the curtailing of movement continues into my next project as well, *Voice Over* (2021), which I'll discuss in the upcoming chapter.

6.2 The Movement of the Choir as the Ordering of the Subject

Before I delve into an analysis of the case study of *(Un)Commoning*, I would like to linger on the relationship between voices and bodies, or choirs and choreographies, in relation to their power to both order and subvert. As I specified before, the curtailing of movement and the silencing of the voice, and how artists respond to these via participatory practices, connect *(Un)Commoning* and *Voice Over*, the two projects created during the time span of this research and in fact during the pandemic. These recent political and artistic developments also connect back to *The Infiltrators*, the project that I curated a few years before I began this research, which was concerned with border crossing via participatory art and which I discussed in chapter 3.

André Lepecki[5] stressed the connection between the voice and the body's potential for both control and dissent, as it is manifested in *Orchésographie*, a study of late-sixteenth century French Renaissance social dance written by Thoinot Arbeau. The book includes descriptions and drawings of dances from King Louis XIV's court, and it is the first appearance of choreography (literally meaning the movement of the choir) as a method to be learned and practised in relation to modernity and its making of the subject as 'kinetically disciplined'. Not surprisingly, the first example of choreography in the book is a military parade, relating the movement of the collective and the individual to serving the state apparatus. The ordering of the liberal subject happens in the transfer from the order of the movement of the choir, or the collective, to the invention of choreography as an art form captured under state power. The ordering of freedom thus has always been the ordering of movement; teaching the bourgeoisie how to dance was in fact instructing them how to move in society, how to be part of a political order.

A recent text by Lepecki about the curtailing of movement during the pandemic resonated deeply in retrospect with both *(Un)Commoning* and *Voice Over*, a reminder of how states of crisis and emergency increase both hegemonic powers and at the same time the wish to protest these, in an endless conflictual cycle:[6]

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[5] In the frame of *Dance and Power: Choreopolitics in Neo-Authoritarian Times*, seminar with professor André Lepecki on performance and politics, Kelim Choreography Center, Bat Yam, Israel, 2019, supported by Artis and Outset.

[6] We discussed this text in relation to the project in the launch of the publication that included a conversation with Lepecki, in the frame of the conference Curating on

Mostly, what the emergency allows is the issuing of permissions to move: who, when, how, and where…since movement is the promise at the end of liberal freedom, it must be policed, managed, controlled, and surveilled…Thus, the contradiction at the heart of liberal kinetics: it is through movement that one escapes disciplinary apparatuses of capture; but it is also through movement that systems of power drill and break-in a subject into subjection, like one breaks-in a wild animal…movement remains onto-politically that which will never be fully captured. Movement is not merely what enables (a subject to) escape. It is fugitivity itself. Such is the perpetual self-generating paradoxical paralogics that movement brings to both liberal and neoliberal power systems: it is the primary tool for drilling discipline and controlling flesh; but it is also the only possible means to break down discipline, to initiate control's own undoing.[7]

Lepecki reminds us that choreography was and still is, on the one hand, a form of ordering of the body/voice/self, and on the other hand a potential tool to subvert it, in a similar way to the duality of the voice, as we saw in previous chapters. During the pandemic, the performative and creative choreographies and voices of protest movements that had been happening since 2011 enacted certain shifts in their attempts to maintain freedom and agency while still respecting social distance measures as acts of solidarity with communities at

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Shaky Grounds: Curating in Times of Crisis and Conflict, co-curated by Artis, OnCurating and myself, November 2–November 6, 2021, KW, Berlin.

https://artis.art/curatorial_programs/curatorial_workshops/curating_on_shaky_grounds_curating_in_times_of_crisis_and_conflict

[7] Lepecki, Movement in The Pause.

risk. Thus, a new situation developed where practices of dissent and disruption were mixed with those of obedience and identification with the sovereign power in complex ways, which created new communities and alliances.[8] Interestingly, these developments emphasised on the one hand how fragmented the protests are, manifesting particular needs of different communities and individuals and expressing a longing for the ability to assemble as a community while being free independent political subjects. In the context of Israel for example, Rotem Tashach defined the radical aesthetic and artistic practices of the Balfour protests as a rehearsal for radical and alternative social orders that subvert the prevailing norm. These protests were in fact assemblies enacting a democratic space as politics, manifested by spontaneous eruptions of different alternative orders happening side by side and framing new potential forms of individualities.[9] Thus, the protests literally manifested a wish to common the

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[8] This was manifested for example when the Balfour demonstrations against the government in Israel turned into marches and swarms in order to adhere to the new pandemic restrictions against assembly, inspired by the Hong Kong model of 'be water', as discussed by Avital Barak in 'Liquid Social Choreography – a Kinetic Perspective on Israeli Public Space During Pandemic Times', *Performance Research – A Journal of the Performing Arts*, vol. 26, (2021) 102–105. On Interruption, Routledge, 2022,102–105. I also wrote more extensively on protest during the pandemic in the context of Israel in 'Unsafe Safety', for ICI Research Platform, published online in May 2020: https://curatorsintl.org/journal/15381-unsafe-safety

[9] Tashach analyses the Balfour protest via Ranciere's *Distribution of the Sensible*; He relates the Balfour protests to a model which he calls the politics of aesthetics, while a different model of protest would be the ethical immediacy model, manifested for example by the civic reorganisation of the social sphere when Black Lives Matter activists took down colonial monuments—a reverse collective reenactment. Tashach

protest on a global scale but in a manner emphasising the allowance of differences within collective acts of dissent. I will return to explore this further through Negri's description of recent protests as manifesting commoning with difference, and later while probing the practice of the Israeli performance

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mentions that while the ethical immediacy model is an efficient method for creating a sense of community, one should remember that it is used by fascist regimes as well as by protest movements. It is particularly efficient as it directly embodies a sense of the common, while the Balfour demonstration emphasises fragmentality. Dr. Hodel Ophir claims that the Balfour protests of 2020 were typified by constant movement and a strong female presence. The movement tried constantly to breach police borders, march and expand the movement limits, although there also moments of deliberate halt and silence. The female presence as well as alternative male models were different to the way in which the 2011 social justice movement and the early wave of Balfour protest were trying to legitimise themselves within militaristic Israeli society by offering former military officers as their spokespersons. The bodies that took part in the demonstrations presented radical aesthetics and non-normative sexualities in the form of nudity, or by raising motherhood as expressive of security and care, in a performative subversion of the expected role of women in Israeli society and the prevailing concepts of security. The protests also included subversions of nationalist symbols, for example women raising a pink Israeli flag in a choreographic reconstruction of a famous historic photograph of the raising of a flag after a local battle. These choreographies and the radical, colourful and carnivalesque aesthetics of the protestors distanced themselves from the national collectivism prevailing in Israel (and manifested via the army uniforms), for example into more open notions of community and participation. These perspectives were developed in the frame of the third annual conference Tights: Dance & Thought, 25 December, 2020, both lectures can be found online:
https://www.tightsdancethought.com/annual-conference-202

collective Public Movement as preenactment—an artistic rehearsal for a future political event.

6.3 The Commons

The interdisciplinary programme of *(Un)Commoning* was inspired by the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp, established by women to protest nuclear weapons near Reading (1981–2000). This was an occupation of public space that lasted almost twenty years, aiming to subvert and reclaim it from a weaponised threat to a place of commoning and solidarity; a temporary assembly that produced a score, which emerged from bodies and voices in communion. In the various works that we showed and produced, we attempted to echo this not-so-distant sphere, engaging various social and feminist practices of collective embodiment. At the same time, and similarly to other projects in this thesis, we didn't treat this historical inspiration as a nostalgic utopia but tried to call on its ghosts in order to complicate an easy understanding of power and agency. We were interested in highlighting the appeal as well as the dis-ease and reparation inherent in collective or communal modes of address and participation.

In an era of democratic decay, *(Un)Commoning* looked again towards the commons as the ubiquitous space where the multitude of voices and bodies can appear as performative ensembles to protest hegemonic power structures and negotiate differences. The term 'commons'[10] stands for a pool of resources

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[10] A substantive rendition of the various meanings of the term 'common' and how it made its way from the
sphere of economics to art is not my main interest here, but I will point out its

used by communities, while 'to common' is the social process that reproduces the commons.[11] Starting in the sphere of economy as describing common land ownership, the term commoning emerged again in the 1990s with theoretical, political and cultural references.[12] In the economic arena, Elinor Ostrom[13] negated Garrett Hardin's[14] pessimistic theory from the 1960s, in which he claimed that competing individuals would destroy the commons and called for private corporation or state control over common resources; Ostrom and her collaborators offered alternative formats through which communities would share resources collectively and successfully.

Both in the digital realm and in theories of economics and politics, the contemporary discourse on commoning tends to idealise collectivity as winning over capitalist market-driven perspectives, and as reflecting shared values via consensual decision-making processes.[15] When the term 'common' was adopted into the digital realm, it related to the 1990s vision of the internet as a utopic sphere in which users produce and use knowledge-based common

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relevance to my research,

based mostly on a reading of Sollfrank, *Aesthetics of the Commons.*

[11] De Angelis and Stavrides, 'On the Commons: A Public Interview'.

[12] Sollfrank, *Aesthetics of the Commons,* 11.

[13] Ostrom, *Governing the Commons*.

[14] Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons'.

[15] For example here: David Bollier and Silke Helfrich eds., *The Wealth of the Commons,* (Amherst, Mass.: The Commons Strategies Group and Levellers Press, 2012) and David Bollier, *Viral Spiral: How the Commoners Built a Digital Republic of Their Own*, (New York and London: New Press, 2009.)

goods. As Solfrank stated, the main difference between digital commons and material commons was that digital commons were perceived as nonrivalrous, meaning that they can only accumulate and can never be overused.[16] However, as I discussed in previous chapters, they may not be overused but they can be abused, turning unpaid labour into data and data into means of control to encourage and produce more unpaid labour.

From a critical perspective, Silvia Federici examines technology as the epitome of the regimentation of labour and the alienation and desocialisation it generates. She claims that the mental illness epidemics of anxiety, depression and attention deficit associated with the most technologically advanced countries relate to the stress generated by a computerised society and can be read as 'forms of passive resistance, as refusals to comply, to become machine-like and make capital's plans our own.'[17] Historically, Federici addressed how women were always more dependent on commons: as they were the main subjects of reproductive work, they were also the ones that were most harmed by the privatisations of capitalism. Due to these circumstances women have instituted communities aiming to recollectivise productive and reproductive labour through culture and social memory.[18]

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[16] Sollfrank, *Aesthetics of the Commons,* 15.

[17] Federici, 'Re-Enchanting the World: Technology, the Body, and the Construction of the Commons', 188-197.

[18] Federici, 'Feminism and the Politics of the Commons', 48–49.

6.3.1 Interdependence of Singularities as a Participatory Politics of the Common

Hardt and Negri expanded the notion of the commons from commodities to other products of social interaction such as language and knowledge. From this perspective cognitive capitalism inadvertently expands the commons even as it tries to commodify and restrain them.[19] More recently, Negri called again for a new definition of the common—not as 'common goods', a definition revolving around property ownership, but just as 'the common'. The common, rather than common goods, cannot be appropriated. It does not belong to anyone and thus can be used by everyone. This is a definition of the common as a constitutive moment, as a mode of organising the participation of all, and as a set of rules that are developed in the decision making that literally produces a new social and political subject. The common would then manifest radical democracy, new institutionality and subjectivation.[20]

Negri reminds us that the term 'commons' was used to mark the juridical status of natural resources that human beings are dependent upon, but that 'common' could mean other things—the ability of human beings to collaborate, coordinate and share. While the capitalist myth of individual agency brought competition and hierarchisation, the commons have attracted attention to the

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[19] Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth*.

[20] Antonio Negri, lecture, 'Singolarità, moltitudini: per una politica partecipata del comune (Singularities, Multitudes: for a Participatory Politics of the Common)'. In relation to the works of filmmaker Oliver Ressler
22 July, 2022, NBK, Berlin, https://www.nbk.org/en/diskurs/toni_negri Accessed 30 May, 2023.

way singularities manage to invent new modes of relating that construct new subjectivities through the process of commoning.

Negri connects the term 'common' to what he and Hardt defined as 'the multitude'—both terms relate to the enabling of subjectivities, as opposed to a perception of collectivity as erasing difference and causing conflict.[21] A new

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[21] In the lecture Negri explains that the term 'multitude' was developed in the spirit of the1968 protests and as a response to failed revolutions which were replaced by the controlling and beurocratised nation state. The multitude related to the utopic vision developed by Boltanski and Chiapello, of artistic labour instead of capitalistic, where instead of mass there is multitude, individual singularities with relation to one another. The multitude is powerful as it can work together to struggle with the capitalist expropriation of labour. However, as capitalism and biopower control (as defined by Foucault) grew, the multitude as a productive force via relations was reduced to mere surplus or exchange value. In another recent lecture Negri remarked that the Covid-19 pandemic was a stark manifestation of this shift: When the biopower moves sure footed, fear invades the balance of power of the single entities within the multitude and of the multitude. The sick aspects prevail, separation and pessimism rule opinion and direct people's actions. Again, when fear prevails, there is no more freedom, there is no resistance. Sometimes an ignoble passion prevails: resilience. A tired awareness of impotence. No spectacle has been more nefarious than the one offered by the covid pandemic, when the productive power of the multitude is trapped inside a disciplinary system and control chambers, which take away every creative force, every desire of association, and which more terrible expectancy or growing nightmare, when we recognize in the imaginary of the pandemic, as the symptom of an irreversible climate crisis, and the harbinger of interweaving narratives with ongoing and enduring social, race and gender crisis of their own; this assembly kills, the horizon is foggy. Antonio Negri, lecture, 'The Politics of the Multitude', from The Art of Assembly series by Brut Wien and Florian

definition of the common could then replace the multitude as describing singularities in relation. The acknowledgment of interdependence is not a loss of autonomy but an enhancement of the power of the commons.

Negri emphasises the process of commoning as a conflictual dialogue that allows difference, and in that sense it has much relevance to my attempt to define participatory curating as expressing and manifesting conflictual relations. When describing the works of Oliver Ressler, which document protests and alternative activist organisations from recent years, Negri said that the works mark a definition of the new common as the embodiment of the multitude:

> We stand before movements, voices, and the whole power of an action that unfolds simultaneously along three registers: against the individual one, or if you like, against the notion of the individual as an elemental atom of the political; against the massified one, or the belief that thinking the collective requires the desingularisation of each one, and against the idea that equality is achieved by evacuating or depleting singularities, and by neutralising the difference that each singularity carries in itself; and positively, in the constitution of a multitudinous subject built precisely on the basis of differences, a subject drawing both its power and its cohesion from the development of all the singularities that constitute it.[22]

Malzacher, https://art-of-assembly.net/2021/11/15/antonio-negri-the-politics-of-multitude

[22] Negri, 'Singolarità, moltitudini: per una politica partecipata del comune'.

This wave of protest as it is documented by Ressler, is, for Negri, the embodiment of the multitude as it is both cohesive in having a similar goal and often even identical slogans, but at the same time it is differentiated and varied, speaking in a polyphony of voices that is 'both constructed and stirring, turned into a tool of struggle, the expression of a conflict that is entirely renewed by it.' He calls it the 'common as multitudinous subjectivation.'[23] This perspective is reminiscent of Judith Butler, who similarly described recent protest movements as collectivities that express differences. Butler mentioned the overlapping of forms of linguistic performativity, often referred to as speech acts, with those of bodily performativity, within an assembly. An assembly, writes Butler, is a collective bodily performativity made of 'forms of coordinated action, whose condition and aim is the reconstruction of plural forms of agency and social practices of resistance.' It happens as part of the relation between the I and the We, without wishing to merge the two.[24]

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[23] Ibid.

[24] Butler claims that what makes the protest assemblies critical is their transience, their unexpected dissolving, and that if they attempt to institute new forms of government instead of the ones they call into question, they will lose their criticality. This transient and critical gathering happens through embodied actions, not necessarily discursive or vocalised, without making specific demands. Butler claims that a collective coordinated embodied choreography calls into question notions of the political by placing our bodies next to each other: 'I want to suggest that when bodies assemble on the street, in the square, or in other forms of public space (including virtual ones), they are exercising a plural and performative right to appear, one that asserts and instates the body in the midst of the political field, and which, in its expressive and signifying function, delivers a bodily demand for a more livable set of economic, social, and political conditions no longer afflicted by induced forms of

Negri returns to Hardin's 'The Tragedy of the Commons' to remind us that this text has been the basis for perceiving the common as a property and as a destructive force.[25] However, as aforesaid, Ostrom's research and other contemporary debates around commoning claim that the assumption that individuals will always put their interest before that of the collective is false, and thus the claim that only the state can regulate this egoism by limiting freedom is also false. Individuals can have relations; they can debate and discuss and create their own rules for managing resources. Ostrom shifted the discussion on commons from private/public dichotomy to forms of administration and management, a perspective not based on property. With no risk of depletion nor the abolition of free access, without individual ownership or state control, the common is constituted by self-produced rules in the interest of the community, literally creating the principles for managing the common resource. The common thus arises from the tension of the relations between singularities, or from a confrontational dialogue that produces a community. Unlike the

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precarity.' Specifically because the body is at struggle with various forms of precarity, it has to be the body that will be on the line, enacting the value and freedom of demonstrating itself.

Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*, 6–11.

[25] Hardin claimed, as I implied before, that a scarce natural resource will run out in the face of high demand, if it is freely accessible to everyone, as individuals will put their interest in using the common before everything. His solution was the regulation of access to resources to avoid their exhaustion: either the resource will be saved but the access will no longer be free (thus logically relinquishing its status as common), or it will remain common but eventually disappear. Negri, 'Singolarità, moltitudini: per una politica partecipata del comune'.

individual, singularities only exist in relation to one another, and this relationality is what creates a social sphere.

6.3.2 Undercommons as Radical Education and Fugitive Research

While Negri's prism of commoning is positive, some might say utopic (or at least generative and motivating), Spivak reminds us that there is an inherent violence in processes of education related to commoning—processes of subjectivisation that maintain social order. She suggests a process of unlearning one's privilege, as a way of constantly remembering that historical subject positions are always made, that 'truths' are produced, and privileges prevent us from seeing the other's discrimination.[26] Spivak's approach relates to that of Moten and Harney,[27] who wrote about the university[28] as a place that perceives itself as administrating universal enlightenment, while in fact it produces and reproduces labour. It is negligent in its perception of a professionalism which leaves outside everything and everyone that it perceives as dangerous to efficiency: the subversive intellectual or the queer, the feminist, the Black person, the noncitizen etc. In its path to control education and impose a worldview, like the state, the university negates whoever tries to put in question the knowledge object.

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[26] Donna Landry and Gerald MacLean, eds., *The Spivak Reader: Selected Works of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4.

[27] Harney and Moten, 'The University and the Undercommons', 22–43.

[28] Specifically, the American university, but this could be applied to many academic knowledge production institutions.

Moten and Harney suggest the term 'undercommons' as the nonplace of these subversive individuals; a place of refuge or fugitivity, where they could hide from the interpellation and steal back what the university stole from them.[29] Professionalism is a surplus of labour that is blind to its antagonism, to the undercommons from within, to the 'maroon' communities. The supposed criticality of intellectuals is problematic as they act from within the system of knowledge that produces the flaws they supposedly criticise. As they are administering the world, they are 'administering away the world (and its prophecy)'. However, the undercommons are not precisely against the university, because to be anti-enlightenment is to be for another type of social reproduction. The undercommons also work from within, but as criminals.[30]

Moten and Harney call for unethical, weak, unmeasurable, prophetic, passionate, incompetent arguments; they are appropriating what is considered derogatory terminology in the academy to show that these types of knowledge that are looked down upon come from the ones that are deliberately being left out to naturalise their outsidedness. Instead of the academic individual self-reflexivity as a sort of justification of negligence, they call for a collectivity which

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[29] 'To enter this space is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons. What the beyond of teaching is really about is not finishing oneself, not passing, not completing.' Ibid., 28.

[30] Ibid., 36.

is active in imagining and inviting futurities, or what they call 'prophetic organization'.[31]

What Moten and Harney describe here resonates with forms of embodied critique discussed earlier in this thesis via Garces, Rogoff and others. They probe the relation of critique and criticality to the type of education they criticise.[32] The prophetic organisation that they offer instead takes as its starting point the annulment of a broken system, and brings us back to the notion of the uncanny which I discussed earlier, this time not only as a disturbance but also as an invitation for a new collectivity that destroys what was there before in order to build something new.[33]

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[31] Ibid., 27.

[32] 'To distance oneself professionally through critique, is this not the most active consent to privatize the social individual? The undercommons might by contrast be understood as wary of critique, weary of it, and at the same time dedicated to the collectivity of its future, the collectivity that may come to be its future. The undercommons in some ways tries to escape from critique and its degradation as university-consciousness and self-consciousness about university-consciousness, retreating, as Adrian Piper says, into the external world.' Ibid., 38.

[33] 'the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society. The object of abolition then would have a resemblance to communism that would be to return to Spivak, uncanny. The uncanny that disturbs the critical going on above it, the professional going on without it, the uncanny that one can sense in prophecy, the strangely known moment, the gathering content, of a cadence, and the uncanny that one can sense in cooperation, the secret once called solidarity. The uncanny feeling we are left with is that

6.3.3 Subjugated and Situated Knowledges

The perception of education as epistemic violence relates to the Western history of disqualifying certain forms of knowledge as inadequate, naive and unscientific, thus as unreliable. Foucault called these subjugated knowledges, and while he was originally speaking about patients and doctors, his queries could be translatable to many forms of research, as when he asks: 'What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instant of your demand: "Is it a science?" Which speaking, discoursing subjects—which subjects of experience and knowledge—do you then want to "diminish"?'[34] Foucault also looks for an alternative knowledge, a local knowledge that specifically in being disqualified enables criticality.[35]

Moten and Harney as well as Foucault speak from different angles about the criticality and subversiveness of knowledge that is considered unreliable by white, Western traditions. These traditions are also patriarchal and identify science and viability with men. In 'Situated Knowledges', Donna Haraway writes about the realm of vision as related to a patriarchal perception of absolute knowledge. Science, writes Haraway, is a rhetoric that makes

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something else is there in the under commons. It is the prophetic organization that works for the red and black abolition!' Ibid., 43.

[34] Michel Foucault, 'Power/Knowledge' (1982), *The New Social Theory Reader* (Routledge, 2020), 73-79.

[35] '…But is on the contrary a particular, local, regional knowledge, a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity and which owes its force only to the harshness with which it is opposed by everything surrounding it-—that it is through the re-appearance of this knowledge, of these local popular knowledges, these disqualified knowledges, that criticism performs its work.' Ibid., 82.

manufactured knowledge look like objective power. Its practise, made of language, facts and artefacts, is an act of persuasion in an agonistic power field.[36]

Haraway writes about the growing dominance of satellites, surveillance cameras and other vision technologies, mostly in relation to militarism, in a text from 1998, which can only seem prophetic from today's perspective. These technological enhancements of vision naturalise the myth of an all-encompassing truth of vision, by the god's eye view of those in power. As she poetically phrases it: 'Vision in this technological feast becomes unregulated gluttony; all seems not just mythically about the god trick of seeing everything from nowhere, but to have put the myth into ordinary practice. And like the god trick, this eye fucks the world to make techno-monsters.'[37]

As I map the realm of the gaze and that of the voice in this thesis, it is relevant to point out how Haraway regards the gaze as already discriminating and dominating, even before the invention of these 'prosthetic devices', as she calls them; however, she does not perceive technology as mere threat, but as an accentuation of a condition which provides an opportunity to develop criticality. Technology's inherent partiality, disguised as scientific truth, could help us understand and intervene in the patterns of objectification.[38]

Instead of these perceptions of supposedly objective truth, Haraway calls for situated knowledges—embodied accounts of situated truths that regain

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[36] Donna Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges', 577.

[37] Ibid., 581.

[38] Ibid., 583 and 589.

agency through the subjectivity of collective historical accounts.[39] These knowledges insist on recognising the embodied nature of vision, and how it marks and conquers bodies; they manifest a feminist objectivity—an objectivity that comes from a partial and positioned look. This 'earthly network of connections' welcomes paradox, difference and radical multiplicity. It argues for 'the view from a body, always a complex, contradictory, structuring, and structured body, versus the view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity.'[40]

Haraway points to the risky terrain of working with silenced or marginalised voices, a subject that resonates through my various case studies, asking who speaks for whom and with what cost. She warns against the romanticisation or appropriation of the subjugated by presuming to be able to see from their position. She calls for a constant 'critical reexamination, decoding, deconstruction, and interpretation' in order to expose 'modes of denial through repression, forgetting and disappearing acts.'[41]

Haraway in fact warns against the problematics of simplistic identity politics. A commitment to mobile positioning involves the understanding of the complicity of identity politics and the problematics of claiming to see from the standpoints of another. Haraway writes that one cannot be either a woman or a colonised person; being is complex and contingent, and the power to see from any standpoint involves the violence implicit in our visualising practices. Being a split and contradictory self means being with another without claiming to be that other or to speak on their behalf.

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[39] Ibid., 578.

[40] Ibid., 579, 581, 583, 589.

[41] Ibid., 584.

Haraway offers two terms which I find appealing when attempting to translate her perspective into a curatorial method. One is a way to 'see from below' through what she calls a 'passionate detachment'—an attitude which combines a partial and deconstructive position, hostility towards universal and holistic views, a hope for transformation of systems of knowledge, and vision of a different world view, where 'the imaginary and the rational—the visionary and objective vision—hover close together.'[42]

Related to this mash up of the rational and the imaginary is her neologism 'reasonance',[43] a hybrid of 'reason' and 'resonance'. To reason (to put it simply) is to try to understand and make judgement or to argue and explain something. Resonance is an intensifying vibration, amplified by an external force or stimulus, and could also imply a quality of richness or variety in an invoked response.[44] Haraway uses her neologism casually without explanation, almost as if it were a riddle meant to cause confusion—is it a typo or a deliberate word play? In my interpretation, reasonance could be a metaphor for the methodology of embodied research as activism or, in other words, researching, writing or curating not only in order to logically explain something but for the purpose of triggering a network of responses that echo with and among others, corresponding with Spivak's echoing with a difference. These three notions that I adopt as participatory curatorial and research methodologies—echoing with a difference, passionate detachment, and reasonance, all relate to feminist

42 Ibid., 585.

43 Ibid., Haraway uses it twice on page 588.

44 See here: https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/resonance

embodied collective knowledge, which resonate truths not despite of but because of their partiality.

Both Spivak and Haraway criticise the history of Western-patriarchal science and psychology and its perception of women and non-Western individuals as naive and unreliable, and both take these once derogatory perceptions and turn them into power: with echoing, repetition with difference turns into knowledge and self-knowledge; with reasonance and passionate detachment, vibrations of empathic partiality and suspicion towards myths and supposed truths turn into a collective imagining of a less violent world, not revolving around dominating vision and enabling intimate listening. In that sense, I examine in this thesis whether and how curatorial research and practice could echo and reasonate multiple (hi)stories and produce polyphonic knowledge, shared through fragmented collectivities of bodies and voices. In the first and second case study, *The Infiltrators* and *Preaching to the Choir*, I examined in retrospect whether these methodologies could be called participatory curating and in what sense they were conflictual. In this chapter, I will probe my practice as a sort of curatorial (un)Commoning**.**

6.4 Curatorial (Un)Commoning

If we are to return to the project *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, we now have the tools to understand how the concept, works and curatorial methodology were offering different ways of working and being together that constitute the social condition as the conflictual realm of a reimagined 'us'. Spies and I were interested in this 'us' as the moment when we turn our bodies towards each other and listen collectively. We believed that by doing this we create spaces for negotiating nuanced differences. We therefore asked: what do hegemonic scores look and feel like, and what would

alternative or activist scores sound like? How can voices and bodies undermine fear and invite empathy? Can the repetition of darkness ever create light? How do we, as individual subjects, participate in these collective acts, or resist them?

In relation to the adjacent Greenham Common women's protest camp, which was the starting point and inspiration for our project, we constructed an alternative multiverse of assembled voices and bodies, where the curatorial constellation might echo artistic-activist ghosts from across time. Sarah Spies has called our curatorial methodology 'queer assemblage', following Jasbir K. Puar: 'an assemblage that explicitly acknowledges the spatial, temporal, and corporeal rearrangements that affective trajectories summon where bodies and voices—as the often liminal and partial manifestation of subjective embodiment—are mostly unstable.'[45] Spies also locates our curatorial strategies within other notions of the curatorial that emphasise engagement, listening and sensitivity to difference:

> Pierre Bal-Blanc and Vanessa Desclaux enclose this within the emergent forms of curatorial practice that prioritize 'the dissolution of the fictive unity of the subject through a multiplicity of embodied practices.' Beatrice von Bismarck refers to it as 'relations-in-motion' where 'actions, constellations, spaces, and contexts participating in the production of meaning are transformed into a constitutive part of artistic practice.' Similarly, Gabrielle Brandstetter's underpinning of the attentive signatures of the curatorial via a 'poetics of attention', or more

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[45] Sarah Spies, 'Curatorial Coda: Postscript on the Assemblage of Voices and Bodies', in (Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies, eds. Maayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies (OnCurating 2020), 81.

essentially 'involvement as a mode of the curatorial', function as productive power relations that are generated more horizontally across, arguably, multiple permeable and extra-curatorial roles via interrogative gestures, a 'socio-poetic' laboratory as such.[46]

We were not interested in a theme as much as in a methodology that echoes methodologies, in an assembly of assemblies, in a mutual participation where the artists are participating in our project as much as we are participating in theirs. It was also, as aforesaid, a way for the two of us to collaborate not only as co-curators but as co-researchers, where Spies' research permeates mine and vice versa. This entanglement and redistribution of authority and agency is evident in the works presented in the exhibition, and then reenforced in the workshops and live performances, as I will soon specify.

Spies used the notion of queer assemblage to render a participatory curatorial mode that doesn't focus on content or theme but on a process of knowledge production that undermines performative subject formations; a mode that

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46 Ibid., 81–82. Quoting Jasbir K. Puar, 'Queer Times, Queer Assemblages', *Social Text 23*, no. 3–4 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 121–122 and Pierre Bal-Blanc and Vanessa Desclaux, 'Living Currency', in *The New Curator: Researcher, Commissioner, Keeper, Interpreter, Producer, Collaborator*, eds. Caroline Milliard, Rafal Niemojewski, Ben Borthwich, and Jonathan Watkins (London: Laurence King Publishing, 2016), 175 and Beatrice von Bismarck, 'Relations in Motion: The Curatorial Condition in Visual Art—and its Possibilities for the Neighbouring Disciplines', in *Curating Performing Arts*, eds. Florian Malzacher, Tea Tupaji and Petra Zanki (Frakcija: Performing Arts Journal #55, 2010), 52, and Gabrielle Brandstetter, 'Written on Water: Choreographies of the Curatorial', in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, eds. Beatrice von Bismarck, Jorn Schafaff, and Thomas Weski (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), 126.

adopts partiality and liminality through a participatory generation of relations.[47] For me, these same tropes of our curatorial tactic are a manifestation of many of the theories I covered in this thesis which involve the understanding and production of the partiality of identity—from Nancy's inoperative community, through Butler's deviant repetition, Garces and Rogoff's embodied criticality, Labelle's theories of the voice, Spivak's echo and Haraway's reasonance. These were translated into a curatorial tactic that enables a possibility of taking part in collective acts but also, sometimes even simultaneously, to refuse them.

Among the workshops and performances we hosted, two projects in particular invited a feminist collectivity that whispered across time and space the potentiality of divergent voices and bodies between art and activism. The first is Nina Wakeford's *An Apprenticeship in Queer I Believe It Was*,[48] an attempt, according to Wakeford, to explore 'the capacity of the woman's peace camp to transform the identity of those who lived there.' The work is composed of a film that was projected on the Greenham Common Control Tower—16 mm footage of forget-me-not flowers from the nearby memorial peace garden, combined with archival footage and first person accounts of women who lived at the camp. Wakeford reenacted the words of the woman as a live performance during our festival, relaying them to the audience members, after they went through a long excursion in the former military zone that turned into a derelict green field, to finally arrive at the watch tower. Wakeford was on the tower, almost invisible, overlooking the space that the women once occupied and where the audience was now situated. The voices of these absent women

47 Ibid., 82.

48 Originally commissioned by the British Film Institute and the Welcome Collection in 2016, and re-performed at the Greenham Common Control Tower Museum.

returned through the act of shared listening, through the echoing of Wakeford; the act of watching was reversed— instead of being a panopticon that watched from above, the tower became the object to be watched. It transformed into an embodied memorial, a nonphallic monument of resistance, a fragmented resonance of radical activism and female collectiveness.

The second project, Michal Oppenheim's *ChorUs: Voice Lab for Women*, was an intensive workshop conducted in the assembly hall of Saint Laurence Church, exploring the boundaries between a religious prayer, a shamanistic ritual, a demonstration and a performance. Inviting anyone who recognises herself as a woman, Oppenheim facilitated daily experimental voice and movement rituals that she calls 'voice-body improvisations', ways of singing and listening together that explore the essence of collective female singing. The participants were looking for new ways to sing and listen together, to let the voices that are hidden inside them seep into each other and into the world. Exploring historic formations of female singing such as chants, rituals and lullabies, the improvisations related to the notion of *jouissance* that I have mentioned in previous chapters, as utterances without words that conjure ghosts of collective feminine desire, disobedience and solidarity across time and space. At the end of every day, the participants improvised a tune that they collectively composed. They performed only to themselves, without an audience, maintaining the intimacy of a rehearsal that never ends, a notion that was present among several works in *Preaching to the Choir* and continues into *(Un)Commoning* and *Voice Over*.

Spies, who participated in the workshop, wrote:

> This shared exchange of intimacy in moving together through experiences of collective embodiment registers via the minutiae of subtle shifts that continuously affect participants both internally and in relation to the group. It only exists in the possibility of seeing, sensing,

and imagining our own body-voices through the reciprocal experiences of and with others. These processes provide different ways of working and being together that constitute the social condition as a conflictual yet reimagined realm in the moment when we turn our bodies towards each other and listen collectively, perhaps even differently. This, above all else, is perhaps also what can be offered to the wider collective, a new attunement to each other, a mode of collective attention towards each other, a different kind of listening into the silence and stillness because we have to pay unabating attention before we speak and move together again.[49]

Spies made a connection between Oppenheim's practice of 'relation in motion' among bodies and voices and our curatorial methodology through the notion of the assemblage:

Assemblage as a curatorial approach is perhaps uncommon, as it tends towards more oblique and even opaque modes of artistic production in a culture that expedites precise and categorical renditions of subjectivity. Its inherent dynamic of multiplicity is changeable, perhaps even unstable, and sets 'relations in motion' that cannot be anticipated or fully grasped. Conceivably, curatorial processes that intentionally activate queer assemblages always expand individuals and collectives beyond known delineations of self and ensemble. It is invariably pervious, perpetually contaminated, and provides necessary slippage in a cultural environment that seeks excessive containment.[50]

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[49] Ibid., 87.

[50] Ibid., 87.

6.5 *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies:* The Exhibition

The project *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies* included as aforesaid several workshops, performances and an exhibition,[51] which was shown in Open Hand Open Space, a space that was once a military keep, run by an artist collective. The positioning of the exhibition in such a space, far removed from the supposedly neutral aesthetics of a white cube, was already recalling collective artistic practices but at the same time echoing the militaristic past of the building, adding an additional layer to the juxtaposition of a hegemonic collectivity versus the subversive artistic-activist one that existed in the Greenham Common peace camp. Thus, the works presented addressed both utopic and dystopic horizons of processes of commoning through the assembly of voices and bodies.

The Perfect Sound by Katarina Zdjelar[52] documents an accent removal class for an immigrant, conducted by a speech therapist in Birmingham, UK, where

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[51] (*Un)Commoning Voices & (Non)Communal Bodies*, exhibition: Zbyněk Baladrán, Željka Blakšić, Marco Godoy, Mikhail Karikis, Tali Keren, Rory Pilgrim, Jack Tan, and Katarina Zdjelar, OpenHand OpenSpace, Reading, UK, 26 April–2 June, 2019. Curated by Sarah Spies and Maayan Sheleff

[52] Katarina Zdjelar,*The Perfect Sound* (2009), single-channel video, 14mins 30secs. Katarina Zdjelar (born in Belgrade, lives and works in Rotterdam) is an artist whose artistic practice encompasses video and sound works, publications and the creation of platforms for speculation and exchange. Zdjelar represented Serbia at the 53rd Venice Biennale and has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions internationally at such venues as Stedelijk Museum Bureau Amsterdam; Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; Frieze Foundation, London; Casino Luxembourg; The Chelsea Art Museum, New York; De Appel, Amsterdam; Hartware Medien Kunstverein, Dortmund; Museum of Contemporary Art MACBA, Barcelona;

the immigrant continuously repeats the sounds of the therapist. In the claustrophobic cinematic frame, only the two faces are shown, their mouths and voices stretch in an endless loop of incoherent utterances. The strenuous repetition of syllables deconstructs the language and at the same accentuates the unequal power relation between the two protagonists, situating it in the realm of the uncanny, as if the therapist is a ventriloquist mastering his puppet.

As accents are a strong attribute of identity, the work reflects the attempt of the young trainee to amend himself in order to blend into the community to which he immigrated. The voice and the mouth, as described by LaBelle, are the place of defining oneself as a subject; the place of struggle between individuality and fitting into society. The removal of an accent could be perceived as an attempt to unmake a subject, erase their identity so that they become unnoticeable.[53]

MCOB Museum of Contemporary Art, Belgrade; Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz and Powerhouse, Toronto. Most recently she was awarded the Dolf Henkes Prize 2017 and won the kinderprijs for the Dutch Prix de Rome Award 2017. Zdjelar teaches internationally and is a core tutor at Piet Zwart Institute (MA Fine Art), WdKA Rotterdam and MAR (Master Artistic Research) at the KABK, Den Hague; she is also a board member of Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art in Rotterdam.

[53] This is particularly relevant in the UK, where speech reveals not only one's origin but also one's place in the remnants of a class system. As Mladen Dolar noted regarding this work: 'It inevitably brings to mind the tribulations of Eliza Doolittle and the haughtiness of Professor Higgins, transposed into an aseptic environment of a rarefied abstract space, with the colorful Covent Garden flower girl now replaced by a host of nameless immigrants.' Mladen Dolar, *But if you take my voice what will be left to me?* Catalogue, 53rd Venice Biennial, Serbian Pavilion, 2009. With texts by

The haunting sense of ventriloquism in relation to immigration is also evident in the work *Królową* by Marco Godoy,[54] commissioned for *(Un)Commoning* and shot during a workshop for Reading-based choristers and singers. The participants were invited via an open call to sing a new version of the British National Anthem, 'God Save the Queen', in the Polish language. By shooting the process along with its inherent failures, Godoy was interested in the reexamination of national symbols and sentiments through the act of translation. The Polish language was chosen as Polish immigrants were the last community to immigrate into the UK after Poland had joined the UN, and one of the communities often negatively targeted by Brexit endorsers. Godoy calls their rehearsal-performance a 'hacking' of the national anthem—the opposite of what is expected from an immigrant, which is identification with national symbols and rules foreign to him/her. The act of translation here, when performed by British singers, involves an embodiment of the experience of non-belonging through language, via an estrangement of something well known and taken for granted.

The work is part of Godoy's continuous research into the voice and its inherent physical aspects. He believes that what emerges in a choir's performance can

Anke Bangma, Mladen Dolar, Frans-Willem Korsten, Jan Verwoert, Branimir Stojanovic, Katarina Zdjelar.

[54] Marco Godoy, *Krolova* (2019), single-channel HD video, 9 min. Marco Godoy (Madrid) has recently exhibited his work at Matadero, Madrid; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; Liverpool Biennial; Stedelijk Museum, Edinburgh Art Festival; Dallas Museum of Contemporary Art; Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA), London; Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art; Lugar a Dudas, Cali; Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin; Palais de Tokyo, Paris; and Whitechapel Gallery, London. He has an MA from the RCA, London, where he lived and worked for several years.

have a transformative capacity for participants and audiences, a counter power to the way nations and religions have used the human voice throughout history as part of their systems of legitimising authority. The work was shot in a way that accentuates its process-based nature as a workshop, where the participants are training and the song is being repeated and exhausted, never sung as a whole. At times the singers are asked to sing with a ball in their mouth, a coerced obstacle that reflects the violent process of demanding identification and loyalty from immigrants, as well as extenuating the manipulations of participatory processes.

The rehearsal which is evident in Marco Godoy's work for (Un)Commoning as well as in his previous project for Preaching to the Choir, is also present in Katarina Zdjelar's works for (Un)Commoning and Voice Over, in relation to a deconstruction of strict notions of identity and nationality. The notion of a rehearsal or training as a performance that is never fixed or finished prevails in many of the works in this thesis, and relates to several concepts which I adopt into my curatorial practice—the impossibility of fixing identities and the critical potential of processes of commoning; the differences and antagonisms in these processes, manifested via the constant negotiation that they entail, both as a reflection of unequal power relations (trainer-trainee) and as a potential tool to challenge them. In some cases, it also reflects the inherent violence in participatory art processes, as enacting the larger forces at work that turn participation into another form of abuse of labour in the neoliberal market. At other times, the rehearsal is a sort of preenactment, an artistic anticipation of a political event that has not yet arrived, as I'll explain soon.

In the litigative opera *Hearings,*[55] Jack Tan explored the tension between language as a legislative and governing force that attempts to order the subject, and the voice that exposes hidden emotions. The installation was comprised of graphic scores placed on notation stands, beneath speakers playing their respective musical compositions, sung by a choir. The audience could then follow a route within the exhibition space while listening to the different chapters of the opera. The musical compositions were based on audio recordings from the soundscape of courts that paid specific attention to the voice of the litigator. They picked up emotional states, moments of anticipation and the movements and halts of bureaucratic forms and processes, attempting to deconstruct and

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[55] Jack Tan, *Hearings* (2016), multimedia installation, live performance at the exhibition opening, performers: Kate Smith and Nuno Veiga. The project was part of a wider collaborative project between the artist and the Community Justice Centre (CJC) called *Voices from the Courts*, including an artists' residency at the State and Family Courts of Singapore. The musical compositions are sung by the CJC Alumni choir. Some segments of the text on Tan's project are taken from the artist's website: https://jacktan.wordpress.com/art-work/hearings/ Jack Tan (London) trained as a lawyer and worked in civil rights NGOs before becoming an artist. Recent projects include *Karaoke Court* (2014–ongoing) a singing dispute resolution process, *Four Legs Good* (2018), a revival of the medieval animal trials for Compass Festival Leeds; his Singapore Biennale presentation *Voices From The Courts* examining the vocality of the State Courts of Singapore (2016), *Law's Imagination* (2016) a curatorial residency at Arebyte exploring legal aesthetics, his solo exhibition *How to do things with rules* (2015) at the ICA Singapore, and *Closure* (2012), a year-long residency and exhibition at the UK Department for Health looking at the liquidation of their social work quango. Tan was the 2017/18 Inaugural Art & Politics Fellow at the Department of Politics and International Relations, Goldsmiths College, and has also taught sculpture at the Royal College of Art and University of Brighton.

humanise this ordering machine. Tan's choir mixed verbal and nonverbal iterations, following an emotional trajectory rather than a logical one; exposing the legislative language, which is perceived to be the most logical, as being subjective nonetheless.

Like other works in *(Un)Commoning*, Tan's work provides a connecting thread with other case studies; in this case it most clearly connects to Tali Keren's *New Jerusalem* discussed as part of *Preaching to the Choir*, and to Lawrence Abu Hamdan's works which I will write about in the next chapter, both questioning legislative processes and more generally notions of absolute truth and essential identities and the discrimination and violence that these perceptions cause.

The question of representing another via language or speaking on behalf of another comes up in a different way through Zbyněk Baladrán's film *To Be Framed*,[56] shot on the premises of a former military base, similar to the one where the exhibition took place. In the film, children are seen playing in a way

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[56] Zbyněk Baladrán, *To Be Framed* (2016), single-channel HD video, 8 min. Zbyněk Baladrán (Prague) is an author, artist, curator and exhibition architect. He studied art history in the philosophy department of Charles University (Univerzita Karlova) and in the Studios for Visual Communication, Painting and New Media at the Academy of Fine Arts, both in Prague. In 2001 he cofounded Display, a space for contemporary art, which in 2007 was transformed into Tranzitdisplay. Together with Vit Havránek he curated *Monument to Transformation*, a three-year research project on social and political transformations. He was a member of the curatorial team (through tranzit.org) of Manifesta 8 in Murcia, Spain (2010). He took part in the 11th Lyon Biennial, in Manifesta 5 in Donostia/San Sebastian (2004), in the 56th La Biennale di Venezia (2013) and in MoMA (2015). He is represented by the Jocelyn Wolff Gallery in Paris, Gandy Gallery in Bratislava and Hunt Kastner in Prague.

that implies hidden violence. They speak and read words that appear to have been written for them by someone else. Similarly to Marco Godoy, Zbyněk Baladrán is reflexive towards artistic practices of participation, and looks at his own role in reproducing violence through seemingly naive actions such as the articulation of his ideas. He asks what happens when we try to represent someone who is misrepresented or unheard, and whether by representing them we enact further violence.[57] Connecting backwards and forwards to the works of Effi & Amir and others, the question of (mis)representation comes up in relation to communities who are often not considered as subjects with their own agency to speak and be heard, and who don't possess equal rights in most societies—whether they are immigrants or asylum seekers, women, children, individuals of nonbinary gender, people with bodies that are considered non-normative or people who have been prosecuted by law.

Artist Rory Pilgrim[58] often works with teenagers and young adults as well as people of nonbinary genders in a method of engagement which can be situated inbetween collaboration and participation. A choirboy in his youth, Pilgrim

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[57] 'I am interested to what extent do we use behavioral patterns of the so-called symbolic violence that are part of our speech and schematic behavior. I wanted the method to be part of the question since one cannot escape the cycle of violence by simply naming it and pointing at it.'

http://www.zbynekbaladran.com/to-be-framed/

[58] Rory Pilgrim (born in Bristol, lives and works in Rotterdam and Isle of Portland). Recent sSolo sShows include: *Between Bridges*, Berlin (2019); Andriesse-Eyck Gallery, Amsterdam (2018);, South London Gallery (2018); *Rowing*, London (2017); Plymouth Art Centre, Plymouth (2017); Flat Time House, London (2016); Site Gallery, Sheffield (2016); and sic! Raum für Kunst Luzern (2014).

borrows methods of religious singing and subverts them through his unique collaborative process of shared choral assemblies. He asks participants to voice their personal experiences, which are later incorporated in his performances and videos. The narrative is structured together with the participants, but still leaves the last call on scripting and directing to the artist. The coming together of collective voices remains a spiritual experience for Pilgrim, however it gains a reflexive, critical depth through the joint narrative of the collaborators.

Software Garden,[59] created during two years of working collaboratively via workshops and live concerts and premiered in *(Un)Commoning*, is what Pilgrim calls his debut music video album. Its lyrics and imagery convey a sociopolitical scenario that fluctuates between the dystopic and utopic. Installed in a room with multiple colourful plastic bags as well as live plants and pillows, the work invited the viewers to immerse themselves in a futuristic world which is tempting, disturbing and uncanny.

The work was narrated by British poet and disability advocate Carol R. Kallend[60] who reflects on her experience of reduced access to care and her desires for a robotic companion. The choreographic gestures in the work enhance its layered view on technology via moments of touch between humans, robots and software. *Software Garden* responds to the recent rise in nationalism and isolationism and the increasing polarities between people,

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[59] Rory Pilgrim, *Software Garden* (2018), single-channel HD video, 50 min courtesy of Andriesse-Eyck Galerie.

[60] Kallend's words interweave with the voices of others including singer Robyn Haddon, singer/rapper Daisy Rodrigues and dancer, artist and choreographer Casper-Malte Augusta.

asking how people from different backgrounds can meet from both behind and beyond their screens. As robots and algorithms serve the whims of their masters, is it possible to create spaces that unite the human, ecological and technological with empathy, care and kindness?[61] If we are to return again to LaBelle, the concept of a limited or handicapped body and the mouth as a force that stretches it and gives it power is also central here; it gains a more layered meaning after the Covid-19 crisis and the gaps in health care that it further exposed.

Another collaborative work that questions the agency of marginalised groups, in this case teenage girls, is Željka Blakšić's[62] *WHISPER-TALK-SING-*

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[61] Some segments from the text about this work were taken from the artist's website:

https://rorypilgrim.com/software-garden-cycle-1/

[62] Željka Blakšić AKA Gita Blak (Zagreb) is an interdisciplinary artist who works with performance, 16mm film, video and installation. Blakšić has exhibited extensively throughout the United States and Europe. Her recent performances and exhibitions were presented at Filmwerkstatt Düsseldorf, Germany; Framer Framed, Amsterdam, Netherlands; Museum of Modern Art, New York, US; Herzliya Museum, Israel; Gallery Augusta, Helsinki, Finland; Los Sures Museum, New York, US; Recess, New York, US; AIR Gallery, New York, US; Offenbachplatz, Cologne, Germany; BRIC Contemporary Art Gallery, New York, US; and many others. She was a recipient of the 2017 Residency Unlimited & National Endowment for the Arts Award for New York based artists; 2016 Recess Session Residency and Via Art Fund Grant; 2014/15 AIR Gallery Fellowship in New York, US; 2012 The District Kunst und Kulturförderung Studio Award in Berlin, Germany; 2010 Paula Rhodes Memorial Award in New York City etc. Most recently she was a resident at Fondazione Pistoletto in Biella, Italy and Museums Quartier in Vienna, Austria. Currently she is working on a project at Alserkal Avenue in Dubai, UAE..

SCREAM.[63] Blakšić explores musical manifestations of class and gender divisions in society. Her participatory and site-specific practice is often inspired by the subcultures of the 1990s in Croatia, when punk, anarchist and ecological movements were having a revival. In fact, she herself was part of the first girl punk band in Croatia when she was sixteen years old. For this work, she collaborated with local activists, independent journalists and other artists to compose protest songs disclosing the minority positions in society. She combined texts from various struggles in Croatia, including disenfranchised workers, young people who have lost their right to education, and persons who do not fit heterosexual normativity.

The video depicts a group of adolescent girls performing the protest songs in the streets of Zagreb, using the choreography of children's play and musical formations of children's song, which they developed together with the artist. They took apart the activist texts and sung parts of them, combined with the noises of factory machinery. The performance of protest songs by girls in the public sphere does not conform to the traditional association of the feminine with the private sphere. The artistic procedure in which the weak—children, moreover girls—represent the weak, subverts the usual positions, tackling the issues of the established yet often invisible mechanisms of dominant ideology. The repetitive structure of the performance as well as the nonverbal elements of the singing enhance again the tension between the linguistic and the sonic,

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[63] Željka Blakšić AKA Gita Blak: *WHISPER - TALK - SING - SCREAM* (2012–2013), single-channel video, 8 min. The work was commissioned by BLOK (curatorial collective) for the Urban Festival 2013—Festival of Contemporary Arts in Public Space, Zagreb, Croatia. The work was also part of the exhibition *Preaching to the Choir* discussed in previous chapters.

implying the potential power of this place of tension to embody and disseminate protest.[64]

Children's agency to protest, as well as the power of noise, are also present in *No Ordinary Protest* by Mikhail Karikis,[65] asking if sound can mobilise sociopolitical and ecological change. Karikis creates immersive audiovisual installations and performances that emerge from his long-standing interest in the voice as a material and a sociopolitical agent. Developing large-scale projects in collaboration with different communities over the past decade, Karikis has focused on legacies of postindustrialisation, human labour and the abuse of natural resources. Often featuring groups that have been geographically or socially marginalised, his works highlight alternative models

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[64] Some segments of the text about this work were taken from the artist's website: https://www.gitablak.com/work#/maritime/ Others were written for the exhibition *Preaching to the Choir* which I curated in 2015 in Herzlyia Museum, Israel, and which also showed *WHISPER - TALK - SING – SCREAM*.

[65] Mikhail Karikis, *No Ordinary Protest* (2018), single-channel HD video, 7.48 min, commissioned by MIMA, the Whitechapel Gallery and Film and Video Umbrella. Mikhail Karikis is a Greek-British artist based in London and Lisbon. Karikis was shortlisted for the 2016 Jarman Award and the DAIWA Art Prize 2015. Group exhibitions include Kochi-Muziris Biennale 2016, India; British Art Show 8, UK (2015–2017); 19th Biennale of Sydney, Australia; (2014); Mediacity Seoul, Korea (2014); 2nd Aichi Triennale, Nagoya, Japan (2013); Manifesta 9, Berlin, Germany (2012); Danish Pavillion 54th Venice Biennale, Italy (2011). Solo exhibitions include Mikhail Karikis, MORI Art Museum, Tokyo, Japan (2019); Children of Unquiet, Fondazione Sandretto re Rebaudengo, Torino, Italy (2019); *No Ordinary Protest*, Whitechapel Gallery, London, UK (2018-2019); *Love Is the Institution of Revolution*, Casino Luxembourg Forum d'Art Contemporain, Luxembourg (2017).

of human existence, solidarity and action. In *No Ordinary Protest*, Karikis adopts the children's science fiction novel *The Iron Woman* (1993) by British writer Ted Hughes as an ecofeminist tale in which public speaking, communal listening and noise making become tools of transformation. Karikis worked with a group of seven-year-old children from East London in a process aimed to reflect the environmental crisis and the role of noise in protest. They improvised vocally with musical instruments, toys and masks, spoke and listened to each other, and imagined how noise and voice could take up visual forms similar to the changing landscape.

In the story, a female superhero gifts children with the power of noise, and the gift is transmitted further by touch, resonating with the collective call of creatures affected by the pollution of the planet. In solidarity with the creatures, the children infiltrate factories and 'infect' adults with their demand for action. Again, looking at this work from a post-Covid-19 perspective, it gains a chilling new perspective, as it reminds us of how acutely the planet and its nonhuman inhabitants are under threat; how touch is crucial as a positive form of 'contamination'; and how only a collective endeavour of bodies and minds touching, moving and making noise can give hope for a better future.[66]

To conclude these thoughts on the exhibition, the works accentuate the mouth as the place of tension between language, order and power, and between the individual and the collective, as well as a potential arena for protest and subversion via nonverbal utterings, noise and music. The temporary communities created in the works constantly perform and repeat these rituals of subjugation as well as fight against them as an endless rehearsal of potential

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[66] Some segments from this text are edited from the artist's website:
http://www.mikhailkarikis.com/2018/08/30/no-ordinary-protest/

futurities, where the scale between dystopic and utopic is yet undetermined. Particular attention was given to instances of participation in which the participants were children or young adults, as groups that gain new forms of agency and invite new modes of thinking about the future.

As in the other case studies in this research, the artists hinted in different ways at the underlying currents of individual dissent within manifestations of collectivity, as they reflected on their role as instigators, enablers or provocateurs, and as a reflection of power relations beyond the artistic realm. The works show a variety of approaches to working with communities that are not often heard in the representational politics of so-called democracies, with a broad range of participatory tactics that use antagonistic moments to point to the violence inherent in speaking for another.

6.6 Conflictual Participation as Preenactment

I would like to focus on two projects in (Un)Commoning that were on the antagonistic side of the scale and invited the participation of the audience: *Emergency Routine* by Public Movement and *The Great Seal* by Tali Keren. These works reflect an embodied conflict between participating and refusing, relating to what Marchart described in *Conflictual Aesthetics* as being active and passive at the same time. While engaged in this type of project, Marchart claims, a subject is both, in the language of Louis Althusser, interpellated by 'ideological state apparatuses' as well as rearticulates the conditions of his or

her own subjection. Both projects could also adhere to what Oliver Marchart calls 'pre-enactment'[67]—the artistic anticipation of a political event to come.[68]

The Great Seal[69] by Tali Keren, restaged as part of the exhibition at Open Hand Open Space, was an immersive installation that investigated the intersection between art, propaganda, religion and politics. The piece invited viewers to step onto a fictitious stage at the annual Washington, DC, United States,

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[67] In Marchart's recent writings he writes the word with a hyphen- Pre- enactment, but according to Chicago style there should be no hyphen, so I opted to writing it without, unless I'm directly addressing Marchart's use of the word.

[68] Oliver Marchart, 'Public Movement. The Art of Pre-Enactment', *OnCurating*, no. 54 Notes on Curating (November, 2022),172.

[69] Tali Keren, *The Great Seal* (2017), interactive multimedia installation, site-specific iteration, courtesy of Il Collection, Luxemburg. Tali Keren is a media artist (born in Jerusalem, lives and works in Brooklyn, New York). Her works focus on the formation of ideology, violence, and political identity. Keren's recent solo exhibitions include *The Great Seal* at Eyebeam, New York, US and at the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, Israel and *Heat Signature* at Ludlow 38, MINI Goethe Institute, New York, US. She has exhibited and performed her work in venues such as Anthology Film Archives, New York, US; Museum of Moving Image, New York, US; Whitney Museum of American Art, New York, US; Socrates Sculpture Park, New York, US; Times Square, New York, US; the Jewish Museum, New York US; Museumsquartier, Vienna, Austria; Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen, Denmark; The Israeli Center for Digital Art, Holon, Israel; Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Israel. She is currently an artist in residence at The International Studio and Curatorial Program (ISCP). Keren received her BFA from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Israel (2009) and earned an MFA from Columbia University, New York, US (2016).

Summit of Christians United for Israel (CUFI) and assume the role of keynote speaker. CUFI mobilises millions of American evangelical conservatives who view Jewish rule over the land of Israel and the occupied territories with Palestinian self-governance as a precondition for Christ's Second Coming and the imminent Battle of Armageddon. By using a presidential teleprompter and a karaoke sing-along machine, participants are invited to perform speeches compiled from those delivered at past CUFI summits. By assuming the role of the preacher, the participants are confronted with the power of public speaking.[70] The work was shot and completed in 2015, before Brexit and the Trump presidency, thus it is somewhat prophetic in shedding a light on the power of populism and propaganda and their role in the development of isolationism and nationalistic sentiments.

Throughout the interactive performance, visitors stand on a rug emblazoned with the design for the original Great Seal of the United States, proposed by Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson in 1776 and subsequently rejected by Congress. Franklin and Jefferson's Great Seal reimagines the biblical story of the Israelites' exodus from Egypt with America framed as the 'New Zion'. The myths linking the United States and Israel as two settler colonial projects are thus embodied in the seal, raising thoughts about the movement of people through history, its role in creating empires and nations but also in creating counter waves of refugees, and of the relation between the power of the voice and freedom of movement or the lack thereof.

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[70]Segments from this text are taken from the artist's website:
https://talikeren.com/The-Great-Seal

Public Movement's *Emergency Routine* was in their words a 'First-Step Training', commissioned for *(Un)Commoning*.[71] Public Movement's projects, often works-in-progress that never become finalised 'performances', research how methods which are used in combat training, states of emergency and counterterrorism create and form new public choreographies. Their study, collection and categorisation of physical forms of ordering of the subject, a 'choreopolis' of sorts, enables them to produce counter civil forms of demonstration, assembly and resistance through local-specific participatory projects. Marchart implied they might act as sort of double agents, between encouraging identification and obedience and inviting protest and subversion:

> The name of the group refers, on the one hand, to ritualized public choreographies of the nation state, i.e. to state choreographies. On the other hand, it refers to the political or protest movements of a potential

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[71] Public Movement, *Emergency Routine*, described as 'first-step training', work in progress, 2019,

Edith Morley Building, University of Reading, Whiteknights Campus, Reading, UK. Public Movement director: Dana Yahalomi, Public Movement Research and Development team: Gali Libraider, Nir Shauloff, Dana Yahalomi. Instructor: Eitan Chinitz. Public Movement is a performative research body based in Tel Aviv, which was founded in 2006 by the dancer and choreographer Dana Yahalomi and the visual artist Omer Krieger, and has been led by Yahalomi alone since 2011. Public Movement investigate and stage political actions in public spaces, following the study of state choreographies, collaborating with state institutions in Israel, Asia and Europe. Among these are the Special Forces of the Heidelberg Police, Heidelberg Fire Fighters, Special Forces of Vienna Police, the Rescue Unit of the Israeli Army, the Finnish Counter Terror Unit and the Veteran Honor Guard of the Taiwanese Army.

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counter-public, i.e. to protest choreographies. It is of importance for the group that these choreographies will always be inscribed into the bodily knowledge of individuals. As Yahalomi puts it: 'Politics exists within our bodies, as an often dormant knowledge.'[72]

Emergency Routine engaged with the new modes of security alert that morph city centres into potential battle zones. It analysed and demonstrated bodily techniques that in recent years are being trained and traded jointly by countries and special units. The urgency to return to a 'body to body' encounter was staged as a meeting between an audience of one and a Public Movement delegate, a counter-terror expert from Israel. It was performed in and around a public building in Reading University, exploring and deciphering its architecture and its potential function in an imagined emergency scenario. This exchange of knowledge raised questions about the borders between defence and offence, obedience and protest, order and chaos.

An interesting connection between *Emergency Routine* and *The Great Seal* is as aforesaid the concept of preenactment, 'the artistic anticipation of a political event to come.'[73] The idea of preenactment, while inherently related to the work of Public Movement, is relevant to many of the works described in this thesis, as they attempt to not only imagine less violent and more democratic futurities, but to invite them through antagonistic participation and forms of rehearsals and trainings. Marchart indeed defines preenactment as a rehearsal or training for a future outbreak of a conflict. As such, it invites a reiteration of the performance in a political context, if one should occur:

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[72] Marchart, 'Public Movement. The Art of Pre-Enactment', 170–172,170.

[73] Oliver Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics*, 114.

The artistic preenactment could, in this sense, be subsumed under the category of the rehearsal—the rehearsal of a future political event. To the extent that this event is unknown, however, the preenactment—with its entirely open outcome—cannot be a rehearsal of a determinate event; at best, it could be the rehearsal of an entirely indeterminate event, the event of the political. For this reason, it is perhaps preferable to think of preenactments not so much as rehearsals in the strict sense (as if the definite script of the future political event were available), than as training sessions. These sessions are there to produce the skills necessary to engage in the 'actual thing', should it occur. In the latter sense, the preenactment is what in the world of classical ballet would be the exercise, the training of basic movements at the barret. It would be the warming up for something that may or may not occur. If it occurs, an artistic intervention on a crossroad may turn into a collective protest format of a social movement.[74]

Going back to Tali Keren's project, while on the surface it is a reenactment of existing events, its setting in a fictive conference and the technology-based design and interface gives it a chilling futuristic edge; although it is not overtly imagining a future conflict, the speeches hint at the prophecy of the evangelists regarding Christ's Second Coming— this according to them is preconditioned by Jewish rule over Israel, and followed by seven years of wars and disaster.[75] Thus, the work seems to imply that this messianic hallucination could become

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[74] Oliver Marchart, 'Public Movement. The Art of Pre-Enactment', 172.

[75] More about the relationship between Trump, the evangelists and the end of the world (which after the November 2022 elections to the Israeli parliament seem closer than ever): https://www.newsweek.com/trump-will-bring-about-end-worldevangelicals-end-times-779643

something that we will all take part in, willingly or not. The interface itself is conflictual as it lures the participants to interact as well as to determine if they would like to reenact this propaganda, avoid it or somehow interfere with it. This could be read as a sort of opposite tactic to the one used by Public Movement: if the latter inserts an artistic performance into a political context, the first takes a political performance and inserts it into an artistic context. As Marchart commented about the time loops of history, acting is always both reenacting and preenacting.[76]

As a form of participatory encounter, both works provoke an uneasy feeling, a strange mixture of exhilaration, temptation and fear. The intimacy that is gained from the format of one participant is negated with the stand the participant takes in front of the public, or the other 'members' of his imagined 'community': in Keren's work, she or he is confronted with performing in front of an audience, both real and virtual. In their position as speakers the participants are singled out as the authoritative voice and become aware of the potential impact of their words on themselves and others. In a way, this is not a collective act, one of Marchart's definitions for a political action, but a reflection on collectivity that disrupts its perception—the participant is singled out, alone, and forced to consider where he or she stands in this supposedly homogenous and obedient crowd.

In Public Movement's project, the accidental audience in the public space becomes either potential threat or victim, and the 'training' disrupts their everyday movement, (another one of Marchart's definitions for a political artistic act). The format of a one-on-one performance was recently developed by Public Movement as a form of 'training', which entails a transference of

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[76] Ibid., 122.

information, turning the participant into an agent of shared corporeal knowledge. The participant becomes the carrier of the information she or he has received from the authoritative performer and is asked to rearticulate the knowledge of the governing entity. The performer here is not disguising himself as an agent of state power, but is an actual representative of a hegemonic entity—he is a real, trained anti-terror expert. Thus, the joint action of the performer and the participant is not a satirical or aesthetic representation aimed to mock those in power, but an act of identification that sharpens the moral questions the participant is faced with: is there enough subversion here from a mere reproduction of violence? On which side am I? From there could come an understanding of the problematics of being in a constant crisis mode, without addressing the conditions of its production. In other words, the work is questioning what price we pay for feeling safe.

The work deliberately creates a sense of ambiguity towards answering these questions. Through the eyes of the anti-terror expert-performer, whose point of view is transferred to the participant, the campus becomes a hostile environment in which danger can appear at any moment. Intimately held and led by the performer, the participants, as we learned from observation and from collected testimonies in the aftermath, found it difficult to refuse or object to the scenario they were taking part in. As they encountered other students and teachers in their voyage through campus, individuals who were engaged in their daily routine, unaware of the 'fake' nature of this drill, the participants themselves became potential accomplices, turned, through the eyes of others, from saviours to threats. The project aspired to confront the participants with their obedience, their inability to refuse, the temptation of the imagined sense of safety established by gaining the secret knowledge of the authority. Through this inner bodily conflict, they become aware of other possibilities for addressing this transfer of knowledge, within the campus—the ultimate sphere

of knowledge transference, other than paradigms of power, of weak and strong, citizens and rulers, threats or victims.

The idea of a training or a rehearsal returns here, negating the notion of a complete and final performance, implying that the artists do not know the answer to the moral questions that they are asking; the training becomes the arena in which, through the act of embodying knowledge, the participant is asked to confront these questions, and answer them for his/herself: 'Preparedness proposes a mode of ordering the future that embraces uncertainty and "imagines the unimaginable" rather than "taming" dangerous irruptions through statistical probabilities. The archival knowledge of the past is replaced by the enactment-knowledge of continual rehearsal of the performance to come.'[77]

6.6.1 State Artists and Overidentification

Art critic Avi Pitchon called Public Movement 'state artists',[78] comparing their practice with that of Yael Bartana, who also uses preenactments[79] as she

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[77] Claudia Aradau, 'The Myth of Preparedness', in *Radical Philosophy,* no. 161, (May/June 2010), 2–7, https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/commentary/the-myth-of-preparedness Accessed 2 April, 2023.

[78] Avi Pitchon, 'Stating the Nation, The Thriving World of Israeli State Art has Its Roots in Communist Europe', *Jewish Quarterly*, (2013).

[79] Artist Yael Bartana, formerly from Israel and based in Berlin, uses the term 'pre-enactment' often; for example on her website she calls herself a pre-enactor: https://www.yaelbartana.com/page/biography Or in this text regarding her 2022 retrospective at the Jewish Museum:

defines them, to imagine future political scenarios. Pitchon claimed that the root of Public Movement's antagonistic approach lies with the Slovenian musical group Laibach, part of NSK art collective. The term 'state artists' was coined by Laibach, to reflect their tactic of incorporating political gestures and motifs from all totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century. This subversive use of totalitarian governmental symbols through punk music and aesthetics has been termed 'overidentification' by Slavoj *Žižek* , stressing that exaggerated support for the system is more threatening than criticism because it exposes the 'hidden reverse'—the covert violence sanctioned by the state. *Žižek* endorsed art practices that intensify the very thing they wish to criticise, ergo, taking the system more seriously than it takes itself. For *Žižek,* the term 'overidentification' relates to the ideological deadlock coming from a concept of society that cannot be fully realised due to a form of access that both threatens it and conditions it. He sees the democratic system as being in fact ruled by the interests of capital, only allowing us to accomplish what does not interfere with its interests.[80] *Žižek*'s claim is that Laibach didn't try to warn their audience against totalitarian regimes, but in fact to imply that democracy itself is potentially totalitarian and

The Pre-Enactment Method: Remembering the past and grappling with history play a significant role in the present-day formation of collective identities. In many of her works, Yael Bartana proposes future events that may become historical realities. She stages pseudo-historical situations, travels into the viewers' collective memories, reflects upon their utopias, recalibrates historical forms of representation, and charts new paths into the future.

https://www.jmberlin.de/en/exhibition-yael-barta Accessed 20 October, 2022

[80] Timothy Bryar, 'A Return to Politics of Over-Identification?.' *International Journal of Žižek Studies*, vol. 12, part 2, 2018.

all that we fear in fascism is already here. In his view there is an embedded ambiguity in democracy—on the one hand people are free to vote for whoever they want, but on the other hand, once voted in, the sovereigns can do whatever they want.

Pitchon's theory is that state artists arose in Israel, starting in the first decade of the 2000s, due to a resemblance between the ideological crisis in Yugoslavia of the 1980s and that of contemporary Israel—a crisis that revolves around a strong national narrative, extreme privatisation and fundamentalist distortions of founding myths, or in other words, the crumbling of utopic ideals. On Public Movement, he writes that they express the collective Israeli experience through trauma and disaster, to address the failed positive collective vision and the disintegration of common values. However, in my view, to situate Public Movement in the ultra-antagonistic realm of overidentification together with Laibach is to miss some important nuances in their participatory approach. I see their work as part of an embodied criticality, as I explained the term before, a way of inhabiting a questionable, antagonistic sphere of identification, but not via exaggerated overidentification nor by a direct critique of identification.

Marchart's examples of the antagonisms produced by Public Movement's performances could get us closer to understanding their layered approach to questions of identification and identity. In the work *Positions* (2009), a rope is stretched over a public square, while a member of Public Movement shouts a set of binaries like Israel/ Palestine, left/right, men/women, and everybody is asked to take their side. The discomfort that the work causes by confronting the crowd with having to choose between simplistic oppositions, enhances the absurdity of how violently generalising the public sphere or discourse can be, and how threatening it is when you are made to obey these essential

interpellations; the performance reflects through embodiment how the political terrain is much more contradictory.[81]

In another example, Marchart described the public intervention *How Long is Now?* (2006), where the group interrupted traffic for two-and-a-half minutes only to burst into participatory folk circle dancing. The folk dancing was very popular during the establishment of Israel as a new country and was used by the government to create a sense of unity among immigrants from different geographies and in harsh conditions, and to encourage identification with the Zionist cause and values. Thus, it is a performative knowledge embodied by many Israelis, especially from older generations. Using it to disrupt traffic is a call to the passersby to question their own sense of community, identification and obedience, by joining the disruption. During the 2011 protests, when real antagonism broke out in Israel and around the world, Public Movement offered the intervention again to the protestors. By doing so, Marchart writes:

> the original guerrilla performance was turned by Public Movement from an artistic intervention into a political one. The latter actualised what was only announced as a future possibility by the former pre-enactment of 2006. Or, to put it differently, How Long is Now?, danced by the protesters, was not an artistic re-enactment of a political event, as in the case of Jeremy Deller's Battle of Orgreave. It was, inversely, a political re-enactment of an artistic event.[82]

Marchart writes that in some of Public Movement's performances a 'quasi-Zionist occupation takes places in an antisemitic historical setting, as a sort of

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[81] Oliver Marchart, 'Public Movement. The Art of Pre-enactment', 170.

[82] Ibid.,171.

over-writing, which, nonetheless, lives visible the background.'[83] However, I would stress that this is not merely an ironic takeover in a sort of 'revenge of the Jews' future fantasy, but always a complex intermingling of embodied criticality towards any fascist potential, including the Zionist one. One example for this is Public Movement's *Spring in Warsaw* (2008),[84] a subversion of the March of the Living conducted by the Israeli youth delegation to Poland to commemorate the holocaust.

To give a bit of a background to this project, the politics of remembrance have always had a strong role in Israeli society; each narrative and every 'truth', sometimes opposing and clashing with each other, shapes people's sense of identity and belonging. History, and how it is remembered and portrayed, impacts the present and the future with shadows of the past. Assemblies and marches are a significant part of the rituals of remembrance and commemoration that make up those narratives—Israeli children assemble from six years old to commemorate the holocaust or the Memorial Day to the fallen soldiers. Israelis march in the army, in youth movements and in nature tours that are meant to demonstrate not only the beauty of the country but also the price that was paid to live in it.

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[83] Ibid. Here he gave as an example the work *Also Thus!* (2009) in front of the fascist architecture of the Berlin Olympic Stadium. Interestingly, Yael Bartana's scenarios could be interpreted in a similar way, for example in the film trilogy *And Europe will be Stunned (2007-2011)*, or *Malka Germania (2021)*.

[84] *Spring in Warsaw* was a 2008 commission of the Nowy Theatre and the Laura Palmer Foundation run by curator Joanna Warsaw.

Some of the largest endeavours of governmentally-driven commemorative marches until recently were the youth delegations to Poland,[85] shaping the younger generation's perception of the 'correct' national sentiment, based on the embodiment of trauma and the carrying of survivors' testimony to mark a separation between 'us' and 'the others'— Jewish victims and non-Jewish perpetrators.[86] At the heart of the trip to Poland is a march that is known as The

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[85] Over one hundred thousand Israeli youth have visited the death camps in Poland since the mid-1980s, organised mostly by schools under the auspices of the Ministry of Education.

[86] During the trip the Israeli youth are mostly completely secluded. The world of the voyage is sharply divided into interior spaces, like the hotel or the bus as extensions of Israel, where they can have fun, and exterior space, which is identified with Holocaust Poland, where they only visit places of trauma and death, and in which they must mourn and act as serious ambassadors of Israel. They move in the city as one closed crowd, wearing white and blue shirts and covered with Israeli flags, protected by security officers. Jackie Feldman wrote how these trips are shaping a segregated perception of what should be excluded from an Israeli nationalistic sentiment:

> Students visit the death camps, cemeteries, remains of former Jewish shtetls and abandoned synagogues. They listen to the testimony of survivors at the sites of their suffering and struggle, and perform ceremonies at the Warsaw Ghetto...On their return to Israel, they are defined 'witnesses of the witnesses' and entrusted with the task of passing on their experience...The students' bodily 'experience' of the sites and the sensations or emotions aroused by it precede any cognitive grasp of the state-promoted 'message.' The most important means by which experiences become imprinted on students' imaginations are provided not by narrative, but through discursive symbolism—music, sensory experiences—sights and smells...It is the

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March of the Living, a silent march on the memorial trail from Auschwitz to Birkenau, with the participation of solely the Israeli delegations; there, the students bodily enact a pilgrimage of sorts—from exile to redemption and from victimhood to protest and victory.[87] *Spring in Warsaw* was an attempt at inserting new symbolic and physical gestures into this ritual of remembrance, adopting its emotional residue to create a different perception of the other and a different collective imagination for the future. Public Movement were interested in charging the site with another sense of belonging, one that developed from trauma but was looking for a communality that departs from it.

capacity of those symbols to produce emotion that grants them their 'objective' power...By experiencing what is not Israeli as mortally dangerous, Israel takes on mythical proportions, as the only place where Jews are secure...Thus, a picture of the world is created in which impermeable boundaries separate 'us' from them.

Jackie Feldman, 'Marking The Boundaries of the Enclave: Defining the Collective Through the Poland "Experience"', *Israel Studies*, vol. 7, no. 2, (2002) 84–114, 90.

[87] The March of the Living walks the memorial path from Umschlagplatz, the train station from which Jews were sent to the ghettos, to Rapoport's Memorial for the heroes of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, where the students usually sing the Israeli national anthem and end their trip. The trail and its accompanying ceremonies thus start at the site of the biggest trauma of Jewish history and identity, where the Jews were helpless victims, going up to the point where they stood up and fought, so it builds a sequence of redemption, from destruction and martyrdom to revolt, from victim to victor. The Monument at the end of the march, symbolising physical resistance and military heroism, serves as the portal of entry back into the land of Israel. The students bodily reenact the path from exile to redemption (in Hebrew— from *galut* to *ge'ulah*).

To do so, the artists broke the segregatory nature of these marches and invited Polish citizens to take part in the commemorative community and to participate in the healing process instead of just being perceived as Nazi collaborators, as they were often referred to in Israeli society.[88] Stopping at various sites along the trail, some landmarks of the original march and some added by the artists, they led the crowd in subversive ceremonial gestures which invited an empathic and nuanced understating of identities, trauma and belonging.[89] At

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[88] The performance was scheduled to happen one day before the official anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Public Movement used that timing to create a publicity buzz around their action and intervene in the usual discourse around it. Eventually about one thousand three hundred people participated in the action, including residents of Warsaw and a few Jewish youth groups who were visiting the area. The action was widely covered by the Polish media, including live TV coverage.

[89] For example, near Umschlagplatz, they conducted a collective prayer which borrowed elements from Buddhist and Muslim ceremonies, in which together with the participants they kissed the ground. An act of kissing the ground is traditionally done by Jews who arrive at the land of Israel, usually for the purpose of immigration (*Ali'ya*). Near Rapoport's Memorial they conducted the action 'Position' described earlier as manifesting the complexity of identity positions. Another site was the house of Ludwick Zamenhof, the Jewish linguist who created Esperanto, a constructed international language which was a symbol of universality, but failed and disappeared. There they sang 'Jerusalem of Gold' in Esperanto. This song is historically symbolic of the Israeli victory in the war of independence, and often used in military memorial ceremonies in Israel marking a united Jewish Jerusalem. Singing it in Esperanto in Warsaw hints to another possibility, perhaps to a multicultural Jerusalem, but it also seems like an elegy to a language that marks a utopic lost vision and can no longer be understood by anyone, a potentially

the final stop, the Ghetto Uprising memorial, Public Movement members burst into perky uplifting choreography to the sounds of the pop song 'We Are Your Friends'. Thus, Public Movement attempted to deconstruct the narrative of 'victim to victor' which creates a dichotomy between Poland (and the diaspora in general) as a site of trauma and death, and Israel as its retaliation and the only site of life, achieved through war, occupation and more death. Departing from the narrative of the dead and calling for a true march of the living, they implied that collectivity doesn't have to mandate the exclusion of others; that forgiveness is more fun and sexy than revenge; and that occupation of a public space could be for the purpose of making it truly public, in the sense of radical democratic negotiation open for all.

To summarise, Public Movement's projects seduce the participant through familiar forms of identification and then, via collective performative embodiment, question and unravel the participant's position. Thus, their work not only critically questions a uniformed collectivity by coercing the participants to obey; it simultaneously offers an alternative temporary collectivity, with more nuanced identity constructions and positions of kinship and identification, through a subversion of state choreography and the intimation of authority; this temporary collectivity is at once threatening and tempting, claustrophobic and comforting, reminding us of the dual agency of collectivisation as well as the totalitarian potential of democracy.

Babylonian Tower of sorts. In another stop, PM members gesturally invited the audience to kneel in front of the Willy Brandt memorial. Kneeling in front of the memorial for the German chancellor who kneeled in front of the Rapoport Memorial in 1970 was a way of offering forgiveness as a response to an action which was a request for forgiveness—a gestural collective response that resonates across time.

6.7 Conflictual Curating or the Problem of Mediation

In the summary for the first chapter of this thesis I wrote that I would examine the act of curating as occurring in the liminal space between enabling the appearance of a conflict and the taming of its borders. As I previously wrote, Oliver Marchart calls political curatorial practice 'organising the impossible':[90] on the one hand, it is impossible to self-generate antagonisms; on the other, space becomes public only when antagonism occurs. In this chapter I will examine what 'organising the impossible' entails for my own curatorial practice and exemplify what could happen in the liminal space between enabling a conflict and defining its boundaries. Looking back at some conflicts that occurred while working on *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies,* I delve into the problem of curatorial mediation, or in other words the clash between the wish to care for the conflicting needs of the artists, the institution, the audience and the participants, and at the same time to enable antagonistic conversations. I will visit these aspects through reflecting on my own curatorial experience and in the next chapter via a conversation with Florian Malzacher and Jonas Stall. As unplanned conflicts occurred during the curatorial dialogues, enacting antagonisms and accentuating differences, I examine whether these experiences could be described as conflictual curating.

6.7.1 Don't Worry, It's Just a Drill

Looking back at the process of curating Public Movement's *Emergency Routine*, it entailed some of the challenges that I encountered repeatedly while commissioning and curating an antagonistic participatory project. As aforesaid,

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[90] Marchart, *Conflictual Aesthetics*, 95.

Public Movement's performance was conducted in the university building and commissioned particularly for this space. But while the university seemed in retrospect to be the perfect sphere for challenging hegemonic knowledge transfer, it was not originally planned to be the site of the performance. This performative training for an imagined terrorist attack was meant to be conducted in a space that functions as a regulated civic institution of any kind, and so we curators, as well as the director and producer of the festival, had to engage in various diplomatic and bureaucratic efforts, trying to convince a Kafkaesque courthouse, a run down and quirkily dystopic police station and a fancy new social security office to host the performance.

While we were having these conversations, what kept coming up were deliberations regarding how loyal we should be to the way the artists would have described the project; whether to maintain ambiguity in terms of the 'realness' of the training, or to emphasise that this was merely a performance. On the one hand we felt the need to be ethical, maintain transparency and adhere to rules of safe conduct as representatives of the institution; on the other hand, as representatives of the artists, we thought that a confusion between real politics and artistic representation might act as a positive hook in those preliminary stages of dialogue. Thus, the antagonistic aspect of the work was already taking shape, even though as curators we were careful not to tip over into manipulation. The police station was an interesting example, as the police officer was intrigued by the possibility of a 'real' terror expert from Israel training her policemen, but at the same time concerned over a potential confusion with a real security alert that was declared in the UK at the time. In fact, we heard many times that making this project happen would simply be impossible, as the representatives of all the institutions feared that accidental audiences would mistake the performance for a real terror attack, causing chaos and injury. At some point we were even asked to rehearse scenarios of unpredictable heart

attacks while rehearsing the performance, adding an ironic twist to Public Movement's notion of rehearsal as preenactment of real disasters. This blurring of boundaries might be what Public Movement were going for, but as a curator, maintaining ambiguity while at the same time being responsible towards the institution and its public is much trickier.

As I wrote in the first chapter, a significant part of curating for me is creatively subverting institutional regulations to make the artists' vision possible, finding those cracks in the system that will enable conflictual practices and conversations. While I'm careful in maintaining an honest dialogue with all involved, I'm also attempting not to over mediate and manage antagonisms until their transformative potential is nulled. These behind-the-scenes conflicts of curatorial practice are not exhibited or exposed to the public, and maybe they indeed shouldn't be in order to maintain the ambiguity and poetics of the artistic act; but perhaps, at times, exposing the apparatus of curating can work like exposing the apparatus of art making—to make the viewer aware of the problematics of the power relations involved, and how they reflect the larger power struggles of real politics.

6.7.2 The Right To (Not) Represent

Another example of conflictual curating happened in the unpredictable clash between two workshops that Sarah Spies and I curated as part of the first iteration of *(Un)Commoning* in Zurich. The workshops were open to the participation of ZhdK's curatorial practice students and everyone else who wished to join. They offered two very different communal experiences—one that emphasised the voice as the locus for antagonistic identity constructs, and another that tested the body as a nonverbal tool for commoning and uncommoning. The first workshop, entitled 'The Right to Represent: between

Exploitation and Commemoration', was led by Dmitry Vilensky from the collective Chto Delat[91] and tested questions of representation in current political art practices, proposing a more complex position of empathy and solidarity. The second workshop, 'Unruly Bodies', was led by dancers and choreographers Last Yearz Interesting Negro & Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome[92]

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[91] Dmitry Vilensky (born 1964 in Leningrad, Russia) artist and educator. He works mostly in collective practices and focuses on developing large scale architecture constructions, educational seminars and learning plays, graphic works, and films. He is the founding member of Chto Delat (What is to Be Done?), a platform initiated in 2003 by a collective of artists, critics, philosophers, and writers with the goal of merging political theory, art, and activism. Vilensky is also an editor of the Chto Delat newspaper and main facilitator of a School of Engaged Art in Petersburg. He has participated with Chto Delat in their recent exhibitions and performances including: MUAC (The Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo), Mexico (solo show 2017); KOW BERLIN (solo show in 2017 and 2015); San Paulo Biennale, Brazil (2014); Art, Really Useful Knowledge, Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain (2014); Art Turning Left: How Values Changed Making 1789–2013, Tate Liverpool, UK (2013); FORMER WEST: Documents, Constellations, Prospects, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin, Germany (2013); 10th Gwangju Biennale, Gwangju, China (2012); Chto Delat in Baden-Baden, Staatliche Kunsthalle, Baden-Baden, 2011; Chto Delat Perestroika: Twenty Years After: 2011–1991, Kölnischer Kunstverein, Cologne, Germany (2011); Ostalgia, New Museum, New York, US (2011); Study, Study and Act Again, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana, Slovenia (2011); and The Urgent Need to Struggle, Institute of Contemporary Art, London, UK (2010). He is also the author of numerous contributions to the art press, a participant of symposia and conferences and a guest teacher at many international art academies.

[92] Last Yearz Interesting Negro (London, UK) makes shows that work with inbetween spaces, syncopation, trance states, internal narratives, intensities, overwhelm,

who facilitated collective embodied movement processes to enable choices about sensation and pleasure as political gesture. The artists were interested in disturbing the perceived boundaries between choreographic, social, verbal and intimate shared spaces by offering 'practices for unruly bodies in unruly times'.

Dmitry Vilensky's workshop, which I both curated and participated in, took as its starting point the case of Dana Schutz's painting of Emmet Till, *Open Casket*, at the Whitney Biennial in 2017. Schutz's painting of fourteen-year-old Till, who was lynched in 1955, was based on a photograph that became a symbol of this traumatic event, which sparked wide protest and accelerated the human rights movement. Schutz's painting was criticised by a Black-identifying

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electronic music, and small dances to affect/disrupt/deflect/distort/reflect gaze(s) directed towards their body, and to cope with 'being'. Resultant choreographies are stage/dreamspace/battleground, working through questions of presence, visibility, responsibility and pleasure, building atmospheric landscapes through the live unfolding of the tensions between things that produce meaning, for situating and expanding (or dismantling) their 'identity' and turning it into theatre.

Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome (London, UK) is born of English and Chilean descent, and is a dance artist and choreographer working since 2009. Her practice involves dancing-voicing as a political gesture, presented between established arts organisations, alternative spaces and club scenes. Performance, collaboration and curation allow her to create spaces enabling reorientation around 'otherness'. Crafting queer spaces, nurturing communities where care and consent promote exploration and activism, is central to her practice. Furthermore, working with pop/punk bands, electronic music producers, sound artists and visual artists in live/electronic music settings and galleries enables her to reach audiences in environments which excite her appetite.

American artist called Hannah Black, who called for the removal and destruction of the painting on the grounds that it takes advantage of the suffering of others to make financial gain. The protest spread, followed by a chain of reactions[93] that became one of the starkest examples of the shifting and growing sensitivities towards identity politics in the art world, together with other controversies that happened in proximity.[94]

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[93] The protest spread and was followed by other artists, for example Parker Bright who blocked the painting with his own body, wearing a shirt that said 'Black Death Spectacle'. Eventually the work was removed by the curators. Some protestors' position was that the artist's identity as white (and Jewish) should prevent her from making use of this imagery. Others claimed that the problem is the art market and gaining capital from the work (to which Schutz has replied that she will not sell it), while some went as far as criticising the painting aesthetics, saying that the abstraction is degrading. Coco Fusco responded to the controversy offering a more layered approach, warning that despite her support of the protest, whoever calls for the destruction of painting, any painting, is on the wrong side of history. More about this chain of events can be found here:

https://www.artnews.com/artnews/news/the-painting-must-go-hannah-black-pens-open-letter-to-the-whitney-about-controversial-biennial-work-7992/

and here:

https://hyperallergic.com/368290/censorship-not-the-painting-must-go-on-dana-schutzs-image-of-emmett-till/

Accessed October 7, 2022.

[94] For example the decision of Dakota Nation Native American Elders to bury a sculpture by Sam Durant which commemorates the hanging of native Americans by the state: https://hyperallergic.com/398866/dako-elders-sam-durant-scaffold-burial/

Vilensky was interested in how antirepresentational strategies dominate both within new political movements and in socially engaged art, reducing the debate to a clear and oversimplified schema: representation equals hierarchy and is thus bad. The corresponding antithesis is that a rejection of representation equals the absence of hierarchy and is therefore good. For this seminar Vilensky suggested studying not only the case of Dana Schutz's painting but also to bring to attention other similar cases, where the interpretation of images portraying violence and death shifts between two different approaches—one claiming that it is an exploitation of the traumas and victims, and the other seeing it as practices of commemoration, solidarity and tribute to the fallen. The intention was initially that each of the participants would be called to take a position and advocate his/her view on an image—this could be expressed not only verbally but also through gestures and body language. Most of the discussed images would be related to different types of catastrophes, raising another question regarding the particular or universal nature of catastrophe: to speak about trauma, do we need to live through it, or

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Also in 2017 was a controversy regarding Omer Fast's installation of a 'fake' Chinese store front in Chinatown, a gesture meant to criticise gentrification and the art world, which ended up sparking local protest as it was understood as racist: https://hyperallergic.com/405812/JAMES-COHAN-GALLERY-OMER-FAST-RACISM/ https://news.artnet.com/art-world/right-wing-trolls-omer-fast-protests-chinatown-1120664The questions regarding Jimmie Durham's identity and whether or not he is a Native American or an imposter, rendered for example in this article in Hebrew by Israeli artist Roee Rosen: https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/galleryfriday/2022-09-01/ty-article-magazine/.highlight/00000182-ee01-d69d-a78b-ee67e34c0000 All Accessed October 6, 2022.

can we trust any position of empathy, solidarity and truth telling? Can trauma be represented at all? At the end of the seminar, we were supposed to stage a public trial in the form of a Brechtian 'learning-play', open to audiences, where we would introduce and discuss certain cases and personal accounts and see if we could find a common ground for judgment.

Eventually, the discussion illustrated how difficult it was to truly understand and identify with experiences different than your own. Vilensky's examples of political dissent of Jewish artists in Russia were far removed from the experiences of the young, Swiss, white, Christian female curators who made up the majority of the student group. The awkward misunderstandings that came up in the conversation did manifest a conflictual sphere but at the same time ironically proved the point regarding the (in)ability to express empathy and solidarity with an identity or a community different than one's own. As it turned out, the majority of Vilensky's workshop was a testimonial arena where people spoke about cases that they considered expressed the overruling of political correctness or identity politics in a manner that jeopardised the integrity of an artistic/ activist act. At certain points, the workshop felt like an Alchoholics Anonymous meeting in which everybody confessed what was not allowed to be said outside of the 'safe space' of the group, mostly revolving around situations in which they were blamed for their privileged whiteness— confessions encouraged by the charismatic guru qualities of Vilensky. The gendered aspect of this performative occurrence was also disturbing: a charismatic male artist was reinforcing his power position over a group of young women.

While Vilensky's workshop attempted to discuss conflictuality and at the same time enact it via language, Last Yearz Interesting Negro and Fernanda Muñoz-Newsome attempted to enable an intimate collectivity without speech. They asked whether bodies could 'speak' without censoring information, whether

they could collapse patriarchy through investing in the imaginative and unruly and disturb perceived boundaries between choreographic, social, verbal and intimate spaces. While both workshops were on the antagonistic side of the participatory spectrum, they enabled antagonisms in very different manners; one brought to the fore the violence of the gaze and of discourse through their enactment, in a method more akin to overidentification. The other used embodiment as nonverbal gestures to encourage an experiential understanding of the fragility of group identification, not withholding friction and dissensus between bodies. Despite Vilensky's workshop's supposed literality, it was more cunning and less transparent in the manner in which it purposefully accentuated identity politics, and thus it was (probably deliberately) less ethical. This difference is expressive of opposing perceptions of antagonistic practice and different attitudes towards identity politics: while both workshops are acknowledging the violence of the gaze, enacting difference, inviting dissensus and encouraging practices of listening with voice and body, one welcomes provocation and the others facilitate intimacy, care and responsibility, even if those are entangled with discomfort. It is not accidental, even though we as curators were not thinking of this in advance, that one is a white, established, male artist whose practice developed in the early 2000s, and the others are young women of colour who have been developing their practice since the 2011 protest movements.

The contrast between these two approaches turned into a clash in the joint discussion at the end of the day, when both sets of workshop participants met alongside other audiences. When the participants were asked to share what they had spoken about, there was a dissonance between the blunt outspokenness of Vilensky's workshop participants, still inspired by the politically incorrect cult atmosphere, and the silent glares from the participants of the workshop led by Last Yearz Interesting Negro and Fernanda Muñoz-

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Newsome. Without taking part in Vilensky's workshop and understanding how he laid the grounds for stretching notions of representation and trauma, and without the estrangement of a 'learning-play', the stories shared by the participants sounded merely insensitive.

As one who took part in this workshop, as well as being a host to all the artists and to the audience, I embodied the conflictual role of the mediator: on one hand I was afraid of offending some of the artists and participants, whose voices were not heard, and on the other hand I wanted to let people speak freely, and in general not to be a self/censor. When one of the participants from Vilensky's group brought up the case of Emmet Till's painting, the tension in the room became unbearable and one of the artists left in protest. Sarah and I ran after her, trying to appease her, feeling guilty, not knowing what to do. Leaving the room is the ultimate act of dissensus, but one that I perceive as an essential part of participation—the right not to take part. As the one holding the power position of the curator of the event, I have the responsibility to not only facilitate participation, but to be empathic towards a refusal to participate. However, I didn't want her to feel uncared for.

In the evening, over a drink, Vilensky asked me: 'why are female curators always such mediators?' my immediate response was anger, as he generalised both women and curators while implying that mediating was a bad habit rather than an essential part of the job. Then I realised that this was an important provocation that I should linger with: do I mediate because this is how I see my role as a curator, to find a connecting path between conflicting subjects, feelings and agendas? Do I really allow lingering among antagonisms, without resolution, or do I subconsciously seek harmony? Do I mediate because I take responsibility for the well being of others, or because as a woman I was educated to avoid confrontation? Do I look for antagonisms and conflictuality

because, as an Israeli, I could never bridge the schism between the appeal of identification and collectivity and its violent dangers?

When I search for a definition of a conflictual and participatory curatorial practice, I don't expect an answer or a strict definition. I look for forms of curatorial mediations that help artists, participants and audiences feel safe, heard and cared for, within their own choice of language (or nonlanguage), without censoring the clashes and conflicts that these contrasting languages invite. Through this prism, participatory and conflictual curating is not about the delegation of curatorial authorship, but about making mediation the very arena of antagonisms, in a similar manner to the reflexivity of the artistic projects I discuss here, which bring attention to their own blind spots and power constructs. I attempt to simultaneously be host and guest, curator and participant, in a way that both takes part and takes care; when I embody both participation and refusal, stepping out of the power position of the curator, I make myself vulnerable and permeable to the uncontrolled seepage of other ideas, voices and bodies.

Fig 32. Rory Pilgrim, Software Garden (2018), single-channel HD video, 8 min, installation view in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, exhibition at Open Hand Open space, Reading: International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 33. Rory Pilgrim, Software Garden (2018), still from video

Fig 34. Marco Godoy, Królową (2019), single-channel HD video, 9 min, production photo, *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, Reading: International, UK, 2019

Fig 35. Zbyněk Baladrán, To Be Framed (2016), single-channel HD video, 8 min installation view in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, exhibition at Open Hand Open space, Reading: International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 36. Jack Tan, Hearings (2016), multimedia installation, live performance
with Kate Smith and Nuno Veigain in *(Un)Commoning Voices and
(Non)Communal Bodies*, exhibition at Open Hand Open space, Reading:
International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 37. Jack Tan, Hearings (2016), detail from installation view in
(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies, exhibition at Open
Hand Open space, Reading: International, UK, 2019

Fig 38. Mikhail Karikis, No Ordinary Protest (2018), single-channel HD video, 7min 48 sec, production photo

Fig 39. Mikhail Karikis, No Ordinary Protest (2018), installation view in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, exhibition at Open Hand Open space, Reading: International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 40. Tali Keren, The Great Seal (2017), multimedia installation, installation view in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, exhibition at Open Hand Open space, Reading: International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 41-44. Public Movement, Emergency Routine, First step training, 2019, Edith Morley Building, University of Reading, Whiteknights Campus, Reading, UK. *Photos: Susanne Clausen.*

Fig 45. Nina Wakeford (2019), an apprenticeship in queer I believe it was, 16 mm film installation and performance at Greenham Common Control Tower Museum as part *of (Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, Reading International, UK, 2019. Photo: Susanne Clausen.

Fig 46. Michal Oppenheim (2019), ChorUs: Voice Lab for Women, workshop, Saint Laurence Church as part of *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, Reading International, UK, 2019. Photo: Michal Oppenheim.

Fig 47. Noam Enbar and Nir Shauloff, The Book of Challenges (2019),

Workshop, Saint Laurence Church as part of *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, Reading International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan Sheleff.

7. Unsafe Safety

The conflict of mediation and care versus provocation and antagonisms has been with me throughout my entire work as a curator and was one of the main topics of my conversation with Florian Malzacher and Jonas Staal, published as part of the publication of *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies.* The conversation, which can be read in full in the appendix to this thesis, begun with Malzacher in a café in Tel Aviv in 2019 and ended in a zoom conversation with Malzacher and Staal in 2020, right after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. It looked back at almost a decade of curatorial work by Malzacher relating to antagonistic notions of assembly, going back to *Truth is Concrete*[1] (2012), which I wrote about in previous chapters from a participant's point of view, and ending with *Training for the Future*[2] (2019*), which I also took

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[1] *Truth is Concrete, Political Practices in Art and Artistic Practices in Politics*, curators Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza, 2012, in the frame of Steirischer Herbst Festival Graz, Austria. *Truth is Concrete* was a 24/7 marathon camp, with around three hundred lectures, panels, tactic talks, performances, concerts, films, workshops and a parallel, self-curated, spontaneous open marathon.

[2] *Training for the Future* was held in September 2019 in the frame of *Ruhrtriennale*, curated by Florian Malzacher and Jonas Staal. The curatorial text described the project as follows:

> Training for the Future is a utopian training camp where audiences become trainees in creating alternative futures, learning how to decolonize society, how to use extraterritorial waters for political action, create new forms of encryption, enact intergenerational climate justice, socialize artificial intelligence and campaign transnationally. Futurologists, progressive hackers, post-national activists, transnationalism, theatre makers, artists, and

part in upon Malzacher's invitation. For me, the conversation is a connecting link between my curatorial concerns in *(Un)Commoning* and those of *Voice Over*, which I will unfold later in this chapter, where the silencing of the voice and the curtailing of movement meet again. It is also the moment in which real politics in the shape of the Covid-19 pandemic interfered in the research, and as aforesaid, exemplified, enhanced and further entangled the issues that were at hand.

7.1 2012–2021: Between (In)Concrete Truths and Uncertain Futures—Fragments from a Conversation Between Florian Malzacher, Jonas Staal and Maayan Sheleff

The first part of the conversation with Florian Malzacher, before Covid-19 struck, dealt mostly with the challenges of curating conflictual or nonconsensual participation. Malzacher and I discussed the role of curators as mediators and how they fluctuate between the need to make the participants feel safe and the wish to complicate their understanding of participatory relations. We probed how the role of curators is different to the one of artists and involves more transparency and less manipulation—how there are certain things that an artist can do and a curator can't (and vice versa). We went back to look at the format of the 24/7 marathon of *Truth is Concrete* as a sort of curatorial experiment in overidentification—an ironic take on capitalism, and

many others offer concrete exercises in alternatives to the present-day crisis within a training installation developed by artist Jonas Staal, situated in the Jahrhunderthalle Bochum. It seems a consensus today, that what is ahead of us can only be imagined as a disaster. Training for the Future instead aims to collectively reclaim the means of production of the future.

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also a way of accelerating intimacy and encouraging alliances by pushing the role of the curator beyond that of mere host. We discussed how today's political climate, with its fake news and intensive propaganda, is different to the climate which enabled *Truth is Concrete,* staged in the wake of the Occupy movement, as well as how identity politics impact the political and artistic discourse and change the way people think about assembling and protesting; we asked in which ways antagonism and provocation could still be utilised in a meaningful manner, not only by artists but also by curators, for example through struggling with artists as a form of collaboration rather than always endorsing them.

The second part of the conversation, conducted online with both Staal and Malzacher in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, brought up issues regarding the possibility of protest and assembly in times of social distancing, the challenges of online assembly, and the rise of surveillance technologies. We pointed out how the spreading of the virus and the way it affected us relates to the precariousness brought forth by capitalism and the lack of collective organisations, and how it enhanced and mirrored all the organisational choices of the past. We asked how collectivisation can be manifested in various localities and different contexts, through scores and new forms of knowledge transfer that take into account the limited ability to assemble physically, without normalising the viral choreography. Staal mentioned that activists should be concerned with spreading 'the red virus', or in other words, to counterrespond to the spectacle of ultraoppressive capitalism awakened by the coronavirus. This politicisation of the virus would be through a new social imagination in a

manner which 'shows a violence in an existing system but opens up the possibility of transformation at the same time'.[3]

In the context of forbidden physical contact, we spoke about the online assemblies as manifestations of lack, of the desire to meet and the impossibility of enacting this. We examined the alternatives that stand at the disposal of activists and political art practitioners at a time of crisis and as a response to its abuse by neoliberal and ultranationalistic agendas, acknowledging the challenges in engaging the crisis as a transformative moment. As Staal poignantly articulated it:

> We need a militant imaginary of where we want to get to. What is the kind of world we want to build through this crisis, how does it make visible what is wrong, what it is that we want to achieve? But we also need structural trained constituents that can enforce these futurities to become reality, because it's very clear that our opponents, whether it's the authoritarians or neoliberals, or the combination of the two, have had their plans to exploit crises ready for a long time.

Staal emphasised his concern with how governments utilise and normalise the state of emergency and increased control over citizens, and how the difficulty of turning crisis into transformation stems from the fact that people long to return to what they perceive as normal in times of crisis:

> There are a lot of technological tools of surveillance that had difficulty to get into the public market because of resistance against privacy

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[3] The full conversation could be found here and also in the appendices to this thesis: Jonas Staal, *Unsafe Safety: A Conversation Between Florian Malzacher, Jonas Staal, and Maayan Sheleff,* in (Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies, Mayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies, eds, (Zurich:OnCurating.org, 2021), 57-81.

infringement, and now have a perfect occasion to be fully put to the test because when there is a sense of collective emergency people are obviously much more willing to give up what previously seemed to be extremely important civil liberties. Just out of a sheer desire of getting out of the crisis as soon as possible. And this is what makes it hugely difficult to engage crisis as transformative moments, because it is exactly in crisis that people desire to return to an idea of the 'normal'….it is even more difficult to mobilise people now for a promise that everything will change, because everything has already changed and that is what makes people so fundamentally and understandably anxious.

Relating to notions of preenactment, we looked at the idea of 'training' as a more activist and purposely directed collectivity than an assembly; a disciplined, structured knowledge transfer that turns the trainees into agents and potentially future trainers through an embodied experience. The training is a preparation for the future but it is also an embodied enacting of the kind of future one wants to live in. At the same time, it is a deliberately hierarchical setting, in which the trainer bears the knowledge and passes it forward to the trainee.

I brought up the uneasiness that some of the participants felt due to the hierarchical nature of knowledge transfer. In a conversation with Staal during *Training to the Future*, on a patch of grass outside the stylish but strictly geometrical aesthetics that he had set up for the training sessions, a group of participants from the Asia Pacific, who had been invited by the Goethe Institute, asked that what they felt were problematic blind spots in the organisation of the event be addressed: many of the trainers and most of the audience were Western, and the types of communication they advocated, such as barging into group conversations, holding a microphone or even raising one's hand, were

alien to their own cultural and political understanding of speaking and listening practices, making them hesitant and uncomfortable to take part in these conversations. Whilst they were happy to be invited to participate, they would have been happier to be invited as trainers and receive a fee, as they considered their knowledge to be no less important than that of the others, or even to be more valuable, due to the varied cultural contexts and turbulent political situations from which they came. Finally, they brought up the core question of imagining and inviting a future through preenactment, when this future and the privilege to imagine it could be very different in non-Western contexts: where one person's speculated dystopian future is already another's actual present, the type of training which might seem amusing to some, such as collective choreographic emergency routines, or even some forms of touching, could be triggering and traumatic for others.

Staal has stated that the hierarchical knowledge transfer was intended to express a temporal recognition of competence and of the long-term work the trainers had done around these subjects, not to inherently differentiate between levels of knowledge among trainers and trainees. Malzacher commented in this respect that for him a valuable lesson from the problematic Eurocentrism of the project was that the trainings should be even more specific and address particular forms and tools of resistance for a particular local context.

An important point of discussion was around how the concept of training, which for me connects to the notion of preenactment that I have discussed before, is inherently both reflexive and antagonistic. Malzacher stated that 'a training is a proposition that you have to follow in a certain moment and only then you can criticise it. So it actually is a vulnerable proposition—but one that you have to acknowledge with your whole body.' Staal compared the transition from assembly to training to that from commoning to collectivisation: while the term commoning was adopted by neoliberal governments to justify their

abandonment of the citizens, collectivisation is assembly through infrastructure, changing the discourse in order to regain and redistribute ownership and agency, while opening up 'a spectre of the transnational'. Both training and collectivisation acknowledge, and ultimately reflect in their format, the power division and inequality in the world, and as such they are antagonistic. But at the same time, Staal remembered that some of the trainings managed to facilitate care and raise a feeling of safety amongst their participants, such as Arrivati and Schwabinggrad Ballett and the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination, and he wished to echo these sensitivities in his upcoming projects. We went back to the question of the role of the artist and curator in participatory contexts as providing care and support, and at the same time as a facilitator of antagonistic situations. Staal rendered the importance of a social contract amongst the participants, as well as the paradox of drafting a social contract while trying to imagine one that still does not exist:

> The risk of working without such a common understanding, is that discomforts and inequalities have no mechanism to be addressed structurally, and it becomes the responsibility of individuals to speak out. Whereas a meaningful organisation has a social contract that enforces shared principles, whether it comes to gender equality or the insurance of equal participation. In our training camp, this was lacking, but this is simultaneously the paradox because we are trying to train for a set of different futurities in order to be able to assemble such a social contract, we can't presume it already exists. But then at the same time it shows how much it is needed, like a basis of principles that doesn't make everyone individually responsible to voice their discomfort, but in which there is a structure to assure that this discomfort is always addressed and that organisations are corrected or disciplined whenever necessary if they do not live up to these principles.

Eventually, both Malzacher and Staal were talking of the wish to facilitate a nuanced path between the antagonistic and the ethical or safe space. Malzacher said already in our first conversation: 'being in a safe space might change your personal situations but not your social and political situation. You need to enter the agonistic space in order to fight for your hegemonic project. And you need to create radical safe spaces—because mediocre safe spaces just produce consensus politics.' His comment connects to Staal's call for a participatory tactic that facilitates a feeling of 'unsafe safety', or 'safety in order to be able to be unsafe'.

7.2 Case Study: *Voice Over*

The last case study of this thesis is *Voice Over*[4], an exhibition I curated for the Bonnefanten Museum in Maastricht, featuring works by Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Yusra Abo Kaf, Effi and Amir, Shilpa Gupta, Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy, Amir Yatziv and Katarina Zdjelar. Meant to open in May 2020, it was postponed to October due to the Covid-19 pandemic. While it stood in the museum for four months, it was only open to the public for three weeks, due to multiple quarantines, inadvertently echoing its title.

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[4] Segments of the text in this chapter were included in the publication for the exhibition *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Holland (October 2020–January 2021). With works by Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame, Lawrence Abu Hamdan, Yusra Abo Kaf, Effi and Amir, Shilpa Gupta, Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy, Amir Yatziv and Katarina Zdjelar.

Maayan Sheleff, ed. *Voice Over*, (Maastricht: Bonnefanten, 2020).

Voice Over dealt with physical exile, imposed as a form of control and categorisation, but at its heart lay a less visible form of exile—the silencing of voices. As limitations on freedom of speech often go hand in hand with limitations on freedom of movement, the participating artists explored the possibilities of protesting against these forms of violence and marginalisation. Through a range of media that reflexively addressed participation, from interactive sculptures to participatory documentaries with displaced communities, they examined the agency of the human voice and its ability to infiltrate borders and alter preconceptions.

The artworks looked at the global system of categorising and marking borders, and how it is confronted with the ever-changing hybrid character of human identity. These unseen borders aim to control alternative voices that do not adhere to dichotomous perceptions of identity, of 'us' versus 'them'. As algorithms have become a tool for reinforcing prejudice, defining enemies and hiding any subversion from mainstream narratives, the exhibition touched on the role of technology and the media in the creation and the representation of violence. As I have written in previous chapters, the internet was once dreamt of as a utopian place of resistance, one without borders, but it has turned into another stage for the propaganda of governing entities, another sphere to be occupied by those in power. While some works explored these notions directly, others offered the power of real-life presence and intimate encounters, before those became even more rare and precarious following the pandemic.

The exhibition's title played with the dual meaning of the term: it addressed the silencing of voices that became more and more evident globally over the last decade, due to extreme nationalism, xenophobia and isolationism. At the same time, the term 'voiceover', meaning an invisible narrators' voice in a film, refers to someone who is speaking on behalf of someone else, telling their story. This second meaning of voiceover here is also layered— on the one hand, it refers

to voices in the political field who are speaking for others, deciding who gets the right to speak, leaving no room for other narratives; on the other, it hints to the artists who are amplifying the silenced voices in order to make them heard, but at the same time risking taking over their meaning through representing them and speaking on their behalf, a reminder of Donna Haraway's warning in *Situated Knowledges*,[5] discussed in previous chapters, and a subject that was also present in the previous case studies.

The multiple meanings of the title *Voice Over* also connect back to theories of the voice discussed in previous chapters, such as Chion's haunting acousmatic or Freud's repetitive uncanny. The works manifest how the voice and the body reverberate on the borders that control and define us while implying their potential breach. The artists used poetry as a powerful tool to take apart the ordering and monitoring regime of the gaze, through the more abstract power of the human voice. As mentioned previously, LaBelle described the mouth as the place of creating oneself as a subject, as it is so radically connected to both language and the body—the place of constant struggle between the force of objectification and the demand for subjectivity.[6] The works in *Voice Over* capture this place of tension, as they manifest acts of silencing and at the same time attempt to undermine them.

As in the other case studies, the artists in *Voice Over* reflect on their role as participation instigators and as political agents. They question whether they, as artists, can give a voice to those who are silenced, and expose the fractures and impossibilities of representing another. Examining the reverberating

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[5] Haraway, 'Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective'.

[6] LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth.*

sphere between speaking and silencing, they ask who gives voice to whom, how can we really listen, and is this enough?

As stated previously, while I was working on *Voice Over* and in parallel on the publication of *(Un)Commoning*, the coronavirus pandemic and the global responses to it shed new light on the issues that both projects dealt with, such as increased border closures and additional limitations on freedom of speech and freedom of movement.[7] Here I will be offering a new iteration of the questions that I raised in discussing *The Infiltrators* in the first chapter: can

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[7] Michael Marder offered a poetic take on the virility of the virus, as something that limits and endangers us, and as well is inviting us to rethink the forms of governmentality and the borders which these governmental bodies define. He interpreted Covid-19 as a wake-up call, a figuration of the social and the political world; in a world which has recently seen the rise of nationalism, with walls built and borders closed, he warned that the Covid-19 crisis can be used as an excuse by governments to enforce nationalist agendas. While there are local specific differences, it appears that in many cases those in power further limit citizen's rights and give them a false sense of security while diverting their attention from poor governance and the inability to tackle burning issues, such as climate change, the ongoing migrant crisis and the state of public health systems. This centralised governmental attitude, according to Marder, is symbolically reflected in the crown-like structure that gave the coronavirus its name. This virus, that does not obey systems of classification and species boundaries, transgresses old borders. It reminds us that borders are porous, and as we will host elements that are alien to us, we must learn to live with them rather than 'conjure up the specters of sovereign nation states'. Michael Marder, 'The Coronavirus Is Us', *The New York Times*, (3 March, 2020).

curating participation be a form of infiltration into a political emergency, diffuse borders and embody a less hierarchal perception of I and we, us and them?[8]

7.3 *Voice Over*: The Exhibition

As a curatorial constellation, despite its supposed 'classic' exhibition format, I treated the narrative of the exhibition like a cinematic musical, with an exposition, developing plot, interludes and an epilogue (in a similar manner to how I'm writing this research). I deliberately allowed nuanced seepage between sounds and sights of various works, hoping that the route of the viewer within these sonic and visual landscapes would create an embodied experience that was both affective and critical.

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[8] It is worth mentioning that I do not regard *Voice Over* as one exhibition, and it continues to evolve though performative and participatory conferences, a format that I'm currently beginning to explore, but will not be able to address in this research. The first iteration was *Curating on Shaky Grounds*, a performative and participatory conference at KUNST-WERKE Berlin e.V., KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021), which I cocurated with Artis and OnCurating. https://artis.art/public_programs/_curating_on_shaky I will continue to explore the theme in *Voice Over #2*, in August 2023 at KUNST-WERKE Berlin e.V., KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, revisiting the meeting points between voices, bodies, borders and identity through live encounters. The encounters will take shape over the course of two days, in various performative formats, where artists will act as both guests and hosts, intimating and politicising the voice-body tension. These curatorial speech acts will weave through and between each other, exploring forms of vocal identification, and the relationship between listening and speaking as the embodiment of struggle between objectification and subjectivity.

The first things the audience would have encountered in the space of the exhibition were two works by Shilpa Gupta,[9] which are part of an extensive project reflecting on the monitoring systems that penetrate and control voices and bodies. Her project involves researching instances in the present and past (going back to the eighth century), when regimes have set out to imprison poets for their words. This has culminated in several works; among those shown were *For, In Your Tongue, I Cannot Fit*, a site-specific sound installation with a hundred speakers, microphones and printed texts (2017–2018), where the audience could walk among the poems and read out loud through the speakers, reincarnated into a multilingual choir.

In *Words Come From Ears*, the poetic words of the artist constantly interchange on a flap board installed in front of a bench, as if its potential viewer might be stranded in limbo in some unidentified border zone. At some point the work asks: 'Do we need a permit to breathe, eat, speak, think, dream?' The second work by Gupta, *A Liquid, the Mouth Froze*, was a small bronze cast of the inside of a mouth, as if frozen in time and not able to speak, placed on the wall next to the flap board. This pensive installation set the tone to the exhibition, inviting the viewer to enter a sort of collective subconscious realm, where the embodied experience of the artist of being silenced, held and governed, resonated with that of the poets she had worked with, as well as with the viewer's own body.

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[9] Shilpa Gupta, *Words Come from Ears*, motion flap board, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua. Shilpa Gupta, *A Liquid, the Mouth Froze*, cast of open mouth in gun metal, etched brass plate, 17.5 x 11 x 18.5 cm, 2018. Courtesy of the artist and Galleria Continua. Shilpa Gupta, born in 1976, India, lives and works in Mumbai. Her work engages in dialogues between territories and languages, between singularity and collectivity, between intimacy and public life and between signs and analogies.

The lingering at this border, this liminal sphere, between the body and its outside via the mouth; between one body and another; between the world outside of the exhibition and the world within, became a sort of entrance ritual to the exhibition. Time slowed down, stretched, uncannily echoing the world outside.

Effi & Amir's work, *Places of Articulation, Five Obstructions*,[10] takes the spectator on a journey across borders, from Iraq and Tibet to Northern Ireland,

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[10] *Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions* was first shown at the exhibition *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Netherlands, with the support of: VAF, Vlaams Audiovisueel Fonds; CBA, Centre de l'Audiovisuel à Bruxelles; Ostrovsky Family Fund; Beursschouwburg, Brussels, Belgium; Artport, Tel Aviv, Israel; and the collaboration of: Institut de Recherche en Sciences et Technologies du Langage, Université de Mons; Department of Phonetics, University of Trier; Prof. Peter L. Patrick, University of Essex; School of Mechanical and Materials Engineering, University College, Dublin. Other exhibitions: Regenerate, WEILS, Brussels, Belgium; Face Value, IMPAKT, Utrecht, Winner of Moving Image Art Prize at Rencontres Internationales Paris/Berlin 2022. The installation was later developed into a feature film, *In the Throat:* World Premier: DocAviv Festival (AWARD) 2021; European premier: IndieLisboa (AWARD) 2021; North American Premier: RIDM 2021 Belgian avant-premiere: Festival En Ville! (AWARD) 2021; Belgian Premiere: Beursschouwburg 2021; Screenings: Cinema Palace, Brussels; Cinema Aventure, Brussels. Other festivals: Message to Man (Russia); InScience (Netherlands); FIPADOC (France), Transmediale (Germany), Itérances (France), TIDF (Taiwan).

Effi & Amir, born in Ramat Gan, Israel in 1971 and in Haifa, Israel in 1969, are visual artists who live in Brussels and have worked together since 1999. Their work involves video, performance and participatory strategies and often deals with the construction of collective and symbolic identities.

Britain, Germany and the Netherlands. However, this work explores a more deeply engraved border, the invisible border of our oral cavity, which marks and defines the sounds we can emit and the words we can pronounce. Touring between territories—sonic, anatomical and political—the work brings forward contemporary manifestations of 'shibboleth', a term that originates in a biblical episode[11] and is used today in language tests to determine group belonging, as part of asylum request procedures in Europe. The work examines the power of the voice and the role of the mouth, a sort of personal mobile checkpoint. Using different types of imaging methods and visualisations of the vocal apparatus, those check points are rendered visible, questioning the limits of identification and definitions, revealing blurred lines and zones of ambiguity.

With reference to the aforementioned vulnerability that Effi & Amir facilitate among their collaborators, in *Places of Articulation* this is done through pointing to the apparatus of control. The violence that was inflicted on their protagonists through various speech tests- both mechanical and conversational is emphasised in their work through its echoing via their forms of documentation; they use the same technical methods of collecting data as in speech tests, albeit in controlled and safe conditions and without the life-threatening implications of a real test. This minor reenactment of trauma, in a process of

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[11] 'And the Gileadites took the passages of Jordan before the Ephraimites: and it was so, that when those Ephraimites which were escaped said, let me go over; that the men of Gilead said unto him, Art thou an Ephraimite? If he said, Nay; Then said they unto him, Say now Shibboleth: and he said Shibboleth: for he could not frame to pronounce it right. Then they took him, and slew him at the passages of Jordan: and there fell at that time of the Ephraimites forty and two thousand.' Book of Judges 12:5.

transparent dialogue with the protagonists, turns what was violence into an attempt at repair.[12]

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[12] In the exhibition *Prolonged Exposure* (2011) I examined participatory documentary practices of passing the camera and undermining the artists' authority as a form of reenactment of trauma. In psychological jargon, ;prolonged exposure' (developed by psychologist Dr. Edna Foa) is a therapy technique which has gained worldwide popularity in treatment of patients suffering from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). As part of the 'prolonged exposure' therapy, the patient is exposed to elements such as sights, sounds and situations tied in his memory to the traumatic event. The exposure is performed gradually, under safe and controlled conditions, and is intended to relieve the patient of the post-traumatic symptoms. In the exhibition text, I played between this term and the photography-related jargon of a long exposure photograph; the prolonged exposure technique brings details into focus, creating subjective images of a reality that eludes easy comprehension. In regard to the participatory tactic of the films and video installation in the exhibition, I wrote that since trauma and post-trauma are experiences typified by loss of control, one may regard the process in which control is handed over to the protagonist in the video works as an attempt to return it to the person from whom it was taken. However, the loss of control is also difficult for the artists, and the process in itself is not free of manipulation and aggression. It is an attempt to correct the existing array of powers while at the same time exposing it as an arena of struggle. In that sense, this duality in the participatory process— of care and repair on the one hand, and antagonistic struggle on the other—is evident in this project as it is in all the other projects I cover in this research.

Prolonged Exposure was a group exhibition I curated at the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, 2011. Artists: Yael Brandt, Breaking the Silence organisation (with Miki Kratsman and Avi Mograbi), Lana Cmajcanin, Juan Manuel Echavarria, Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, Avi Mograbi, Christoph Weber, Rona Yefman and Mich'ael

From there the viewer could pass into the room of Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame,[13] to find a film/video work showing a choir singing with a metallic voice, sometimes sounding like glitches in a synthesised poem, at others like a computerised prayer. Characters appear and disappear, their body movements repetitive and erratic. In the background, documentary footage of the Separation Wall and other images of the injured landscape created by the Israeli occupation are visible. Fragments of Edwards Said's text *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* also take their place on the screen. This poetic and personal text, written in 1983 about Palestinian refugees, is repurposed by the artists to reflect on what it means now to be designated as an 'illegal' person, body or entity. The text in the work starts with the words: 'We have experienced much that has not been recorded. Many of us have been killed, scared, silenced, without a trace. And the images used to represent us, only diminish our reality more.'

The characters in the video are avatars of people who participated in the Great March of Return, the Gaza border protests that took place every Friday from March 2018 to December 2019. The march was a demonstration for the right of Palestinian refugees to return to Palestine, and against the violence and the

Zupraner. Maayan Sheleff, ed., *Prolonged Exposure*, Tel Aviv: the Center for. Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, 2011).

[13] Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rhame, *At Those Terrifying Frontiers Where The Existence And Disappearance of People Fade Into Each Other* (video still), single channel video, two channel sound, 8 min 6 sec, 2017. Courtesy of the artists. Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou-Rahme were born in 1983 in Nicosia, Cyprus and Boston, USA. They live and work in Ramallah and New York. Their work stands at the intersection of performativity, political imaginaries, the body and virtuality, resampling the past and reimagining a present not bound to colonial and capitalist narratives.

ongoing siege of Israel on Gaza since 2006. The avatars are constructed of still images found on the internet and turned into virtual animated characters. The avatar software renders the missing data in the original image as scars, glitches and incomplete features on the characters' faces. The impossibility of documenting personal trauma thus becomes an attempt to create a sort of fugitive, futuristic, collective voice.

Stepping into a large dark space, the viewers then had a choice: to go right towards the work of Yusra Abo Kaf and into a narrow hallway with Lawrence Abu Hamdan's installation, two works that touch on trauma and the voice-gaze relationship in the context of Israel-Palestine; or to walk towards the left, drawn by the sound of Amir Yatziv's work, illuminating the connecting space, and into the left hallway with the works of Katarina Zdjelar, and of Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy, documusicals that question borders in the European context.

In Amir Yatziv's[14] work, a virtual boat is sinking in virtual water, its condition affected by a live feed of the exchange rate of bitcoin versus US dollar. The image of a sinking boat, which has become a symbol of the current refugee crisis, is complemented by a voiceover from the film *White Wilderness*, an

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[14] Amir Yatziv, *It's Like Being Lost In A Hall Of Mirrors*, live simulation CGI, 2020.

Amir Yatziv, born in 1972, is a filmmaker and visual artist who lives in Tel Aviv, Israel. Yatziv is interested in past narratives and their contemporary interpretation. In his work he creates a sense of estrangement, revealing the impossibility of a single coherent historical truth. Special thanks to Gilad Reich for his part in the exhibition text.

Oscar winning nature documentary produced by Disney in 1958,[15] highlighting life in the subarctic. The endless loop of the sinking boat in its sterile background, devoid of the drama of real people drowning, juxtaposed with the vocal drama describing a perilous journey, encourages the viewers to imagine a fictitious story of a refugee journey based on the viewers' collective memory of such tragic events seen constantly on the news. The authoritative voice also recalls the ghosts of colonial perceptions of 'wilderness' and its inhabitants, and it takes some time to realise that the voiceover does not tell the story of a perilous journey of refugees, but of small mammals called lemmings. In fact, the film is mostly remembered for the scene in which migrating lemmings jump to their death from a cliff into the ocean. Years later it has become clear that the scene was staged, and the lemmings neither migrated nor commited suicide, but were pushed to their death by the film's production crew in order to create drama.

The conjunction of this voiceover with the image of the boat in its realm of live simulation, affected by the arbitrariness of political and (virtual) economic empires, emphasises the role of media manipulation in establishing power relations. The simulation or rehearsal of trauma for entertainment, which turns into a real trauma for some, reminds us of the thin line between documentary and fiction and between horror and spectacle in the era of 'fake news' and propaganda, where 'truths' are constructed to serve the agenda of the powerful, who 'produce' and 'direct' reality by inflicting terror and violence on others. The invisible tragedy here has more of an emotional residue than if it had been graphically represented; not being fed with violent representations,

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[15] White Wilderness, nature documentary film shot in canada, directed by James Algar and nnarated by Winston Hibler. Produced by Walt Disney Productions.

the viewers imagine the tragedy in a way that resonates with their own experiences.

As we saw in *(Un)Commoning*, Katarina Zdjelar[16] often employs the rehearsal or the training as a working method to explore the voice as a subject and substance. For her work in *Voice Over* she brought together four musicians for an improvisational interpretation of a text written by poet Athena Farrokhzad, *Europe, Where Have You Misplaced Love?* (2018). The aim of the improvisation is not to arrive at a final performance, but rather to keep the range of possibilities open. The musicians, themselves immigrants in Holland, take turns in offering their potential versions for the music that should accompany the poem. They let go and pass over control to their peers just before arriving at a common melody, at which point doubts or another voice steer the process in a different direction. It becomes a continuous search in which a multiplicity of interrelating voices coexist, and differences find a welcoming home. This approach adds a layered interpretation to Farrokhzad's impressions, which are critical towards Europe's relation to refugees and immigrants.[17]

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[16] Katarina Zdjelar, *Reading 'Europe Where Have You Displaced Love?'*, single channel video, 29 min 26 secs, 2019. Courtesy of the artist. Katarina Zdjelar, born in Belgrade, 1979, is an artist based in Rotterdam. Her practice consists of working with moving image and sound, performances, book projects and creating different platforms for speculation and exchange. Some segments from this text are revised from the artists' website.

[17] In the exhibition space and in the publication, there was a QR code to scan and read the full poem. The poem starts with this segment:

    A Letter to Europe

Europe, I've given you all and now I'm nothing. Europe, 260 Euro and 76 cents,

I can't stand my own mind.

Europe, when will you end the human war? Go fuck yourself with your Christ complex.

I don't feel good, don't bother me. I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.

Europe, when will you retire? When will you take off your clothes? When will you look at yourself through the grave? When will you be worthy of your millions of guest workers?

Europe, why are your libraries full of tears?

It's been a long summer and the drought is spreading. Not a single store has a fan to sell. Soon you'll no longer have a livable climate or any welfare. I fantasize about the walls that will greet you when disaster strikes.

Europe, repeat after me: Football players can be French who are African who are French. It isn't complicated. Everyone seems to understand the consequences of colonialism, except you, the cause.

Europe, you are an avocado that rots before it ripens. You are a bomb shelter with room only for the landlord. You have a self-image made of Teflon, nothing sticks.

You are an oversized blot of shame on the map.

Europe, 63 years before Lampedusa, Césaire wrote that you were impossible to defend. How many dead in the Mediterranean this week? Each refugee who crosses your borders is a declaration of war.

When the Whistle Glares by Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy[18] also diffuses the borders between rehearsal and performance and between documentary and fiction. It takes place in the Capriles Clinic, a psychiatric institution in Willemstad, Curaçao. The artists participated in the artist in residence program of the Instituto Buena Bista, an art school for young people that is located on the clinic grounds. Together with patients and students, for the duration of four months, they investigated how one could imagine the clinic as a village. The film provides insight into the daily life at the clinic while incorporating moments in which the patients were invited to initiate and direct their own performances, taking ownership of their representation. The result is a hybrid between a musical and a participatory documentary, reflecting on definitions of 'us' and 'others' in the constructs of a community. The physical borders of the clinic and the metaphorical boundaries between the filmmakers and their protagonists are blurred, in a work that brings up ethical questions in an empathic and compelling manner. A series of interactive sculptures, *Coral Graft, Mental Reef*, were installed next to the film and were meant to be played

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[18] Domenico Mangano and Marieke van Rooy, *When the Whistle Glares*, single channel video, 50 mins, 2019. From *The Dilution Project*. Courtesy of the artists and MAGAZZINO Gallery, Rome, Italy. Domenico Mangano, born in Palermo, Italy, 1976, and Marieke van Rooy, born in Weert, Netherlands, 1974, live and work in Amsterdam. They combine archival research, participation and educational projects in their process. Until recently they participated in a residency at the Jan van Eyck Academie in Maastricht. The film was developed during an artist residency at the Instituto Buena Bista, Curaçao, 2016, supported by the Mondriaan Fund.. The clay sculptures were made during a residency at Sundaymorning@EKWC, Oisterwijk, supported by Fonds Kwadraat. Many thanks to the Jan van Eyck Academie and Gallery MAGAZZINO, Rome.

as musical instruments, inviting the museum visitors to become part of the encounter and the community in the film, further stretching the boundaries between 'insider' and 'foreigner', artist and nonartist, spectator and participant.

This film is the last part of a trilogy about the heritage of the antipsychiatry movement in the Netherlands. The project began with an investigation of the Dennendal affair that took place at the psychiatric institution Willem Arntsz Hoeve in Den Dolder, the Netherlands, 1970–1974. Here, the psychologist Carel Muller and architect Frans van Klingeren promoted the radical emancipation of the patients, by envisioning opening up the institution's grounds to let patients intermingle with society outside. They named this principle 'dilution', the idea of adding 'normality' to 'craziness'. The artists reenacted the 'dilution concept' through their participatory exchanges. As another layer of exposing constructs of inclusion and exclusion, this last chapter, filmed in a former Dutch colony, hints at the ghosts of a colonial past. It attempts to reclaim the unique voices of those who are often silenced or forced to merge with a culture foreign to their own, excluded by society in more than one way.

Going back to the main space and turning towards the other hallway, on a small intimate screen, the viewer encountered the film *Silence*. A few years ago, Yusra Abo Kaf,[19] at the time a film student at Sapir Academic College in Israel,

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[19] Yusra Abo Kaf, *Silence*, single channel video, 2 min 55 sec, 2019.Yusra Abo Kaf was born in 1983 in Um Batin Village, Israel, where she also lives and works. The work was created as part of Abo Kaf's graduate project at the Art School of Sapir Academic College, Israel, and the artist wishes to thank all her teachers, with special thanks to Daniel Meir for his help with the sound design.

was working on a feature documentary, within which she intended to tell the stories of Bedouin women from her village and others in the Israeli Negev area, who had disappeared and were found dead, allegedly victims of violence by men from their own families. The Bedouin communities tend not to talk about this, out of fear that they will suffer revenge, and many crimes are left unsolved. However, as Abo Kaf persisted and approached the women again and again, many of whom she had known for a long time, some of them began to talk. She then started to receive death threats and was forced to go into protective custody. She left the film department, and began to study art, where I taught her, and created *Silence* as her final project (originally the project included an installation with clay self-portraits, made by the artist and by the women who participate in the video, by laying on the floor in front of the screening).

Silence shows a choir of Bedouin women singing a song of love and fear, in the midst of a desert grove, a place where many women have disappeared. This old song is a rendition of an even older love song that used to be sung at weddings by Bedouin women. Over the years, some of the words changed, as the women inserted into this poetry verses about the violence that they suffer. This has become their own subversive tradition, passed on from one generation to the next, sung only in the women's tent at weddings, but meant

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For Bedouin woman in Israel, it is especially hard to work as an artist for various reasons. Among these are, the lack of infrastructure and support from the Israeli government for Bedouin communities, as well as lack of support from their parents or husbands, as they are expected to make money and support the family as well as be the major caretakers of their children. Despite all this, Abo Kaf continues to record an archive of protest songs sung by Bedouin women in various communities in Israel. She has also established an art collective with fellow Bedouin female graduates and they work together on various projects.

for the ears of the men in the tent nearby. As the women sing in the video, at first glance it looks like they are making pita bread and coffee. However, if one looks closely, it becomes clear that they create the rhythmic music with the same tools used to make coffee and make their own portraits from the soil with the same gestures that are used to make bread. A ghostly female figure dances occasionally, circling repetitively among the singing circle, while the sound of distant cars reminds us that we are not in some utopic dream, always close to danger. Thus, with their voices and with their bodies, the artist and her collaborators are manifesting their freedom, not only from the violence of the men in their communities, but from the violent gaze of the viewers with their presupposed expectations.

Dominating the right hallway, in a space that could either be the entrance or exit of the exhibition, is Lawrence Abu Hamdan's *This Whole Time There Were No Landmines*.[20] The text about this work was written by Lawrence Abu Hamdan and brought as-is to the exhibition space as well as into this research, as a gesture of respect towards his request that the text not be changed:

> The work is set in The Golan Heights, in an area illegally occupied by Israel from Syria since the 1967 war. Families and communities living

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[20] Lawrence Abu Hamdan, *This Whole Time There Were No Landmines*, 8 video loops on monitors with sound, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and mor charpentier.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan was born in 1985 in Amman, Jordan, and currently lives in Beirut. His audio investigations have been used as evidence at the UK Asylum and Immigration Tribunal and as advocacy for organisations such as Amnesty International together with fellow researchers from Forensic Architecture. He is one of the four collective winners of the recent Turner Prize.

on either side of the ceasefire line have been divided. In the Golan Heights there is a place called the 'shouting valley,' where the topography creates an acoustic leak across the border. Here families gather to hear each other's voices and wave to one another across the otherwise impervious divide. These are the sounds you hear.

The images you see (in the work) are from May 15th, 2011, when protesters from all over the country gathered on the Syrian side of the shouting valley for the anniversary of the Nakba.[21] However, unlike during the usual gatherings in this valley, this time the voice was not the only thing to cross the border. 150 Palestinian protesters from Syria unexpectedly broke into Israeli territory. For the first time since 1967 the border was breached. Four protesters were later killed by Israeli soldiers, yet the majority managed to exercise, even if briefly, their right of return.

This border breach was captured by an anonymous source, filming on their phone from the Israeli side, where communities from the shouting valley gathered in solidarity with the protestors. On this video, among the loud protest chants of those breaching the border, we can just about make out the voices of the families of the shouting valley in the background. However, they are not shouting their usual salutations. Like the border itself their voices became overpowered by the noise as they shout at the top of their lungs:

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[21] The *Nakba*, in Arabic meaning disaster or catastrophe, is the dispossession and expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians in 1948 from land that became Israel upon its establishment as an independent state.

Enough

Enough

Stop

Stop

Hey. Stop

Enough

Enough

Enough

Stop. Enough

Stop. Enough

Enough

There are land mines

Stop

Stop

There are land mines. Land Mines Land Mines. Land Mines
Enough

7.3.1 Focus: Lawrence Abu Hamdan—Relational Sonics or the Politics of Listening

In Lawrence Abu Hamdan's works, the realm of the voice becomes a judicial and activist arena in which supposed truths are reexamined and taken apart. Abu Hamdan differentiates between eyewitness testimony that was archetypal as admissible evidence in court in the twentieth century, to the forensic turn of the mid 1980s, discussed in *Mengele's Skull* by Thomas Keenan and Eyal

Weizman.[22] Within this forensic turn, Abu Hamdan observed a shift towards speaking and listening, rather than seeing, as testimony.[23] This shift for Hamdan, manifested in the form of technologies for analysing audio recordings in court, lie and stress detectors, and mostly in asylum seekers' accent tests for the purpose of legal, social and ethnic profiling, produces an

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[22] Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman, 'Mengele's Skull: from Witness to Object',*Cabinet Magazine*, no. 43, Forensics, (Autumn, 2011), https://cabinetmagazine.org/issues/43/keenan_weizman.php, Accessed 25 March, 2023.

[23] Abu Hamdan says:

> The 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) ordered all police interview rooms to be equipped with audio recording machines, so that all interrogations from then on would be audio recorded instead of transcribed into text. The passing of this law unintentionally catalysed the birth of a radical form of listening that would over the next twenty-eight years transform the speaking subject in the process of law. This legislation fundamentally stretched the role of the juridical ear from simply hearing words spoken aloud to actively listening to the process of speaking, as a new form of forensic evidence…The advent of PACE is representative of an epistemic and technological shift which gave rise to new forms of testimony based on the analysis of objects rather than witness accounts. In the case of forensic listening there is no clean shift from witness account to the expert analysis of objects because the witness account and the object under investigation become the same thing. The voice is at once the means of testimony and the object of forensic analysis.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 'Aural Contract: Forensic Listening and the Reorganization of the Speaking Subject', Cesura// Acceso, volume 1, 2014, 201–203.

overgovernance of the voice which is used to control territory and the production of space.[24]

The relation of the control and limitation of voices to that of bodies and territories is crucial to the exhibition's concept, as well as providing a connecting link from this thesis's first case study, *The Infiltrators*, to its last, *Voice Over*. It particularly corresponds with Effi & Amir's work *Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions*, which also addresses the use of shibboleths in accent detection tests for asylum seekers and the mouth and voice as an arena where borders are drawn. [25]

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[24] Abu Hamdan deconstructs the term 'jurisdiction' to exemplify this claim:

> If we divide the term 'jurisdiction,' which connotes a territorial range over which a legal authority extends, we see that 'juris' refers to a legal authority or right and 'diction' refers to speech. 'Diction' in linguistics is also defined as the manner of enunciating and uttering sounds and words, indicating not simply speech but the process of enunciation and amplification of words. By understanding the etymology of the term jurisdiction, we see that the law itself operates as a speech space in which those within its range of audibility are subject to its authority.

Ibid., 212.

[25] In addition to its contemporary use in asylum seeker accent detection tests, 'shibboleth' has a biblical origin in the story of the war between the people of Gilead and the people of Ephraim, in which whilst crossing the border they were asked to utter the word, and anyone who said 'sibboleth' rather than 'shibboleth' was identified as an Ephraimite, and killed. In the seventeenth century the word was used to detect foreigners or strangers, and by the nineteenth century it was used as a general term

In several of his works[26] Abu Hamdan directly examined the problematics of asylum seeker accent tests, which often incorrectly decipher the origin of the asylum seekers, mistakes that have grave consequences on their lives. The false interpretations stem from the law's regarding of the linguistic deciphering of voices as pure science, or what Abu Hamdan calls forensic listening, and subsequent use of any conclusions to draw and enforce strict borders. Hamdan calls us to listen to these voices 'as a biography of migration, as an irregular and itinerant concoction of contagiously accumulated voices, rather than an immediately distinguishable sound that avows its unshakable roots neatly within the confines of a nation state.'[27] Listening, claims Hamdan, is not a passive and objective process that points to the identity of the object under investigation, but one that amplifies the political agency and subjectivity of the listener. In his works he emphasises the relationality and subjectivity of these sonic remnants, by abstracting the voice from language into non comprehensible syllables that distance it from the 'pre-programmed prejudice of the ear';[28] he also accentuates the relation between the listener and what is being listened to, as the voice both sustains borders and subverts them. The fight for the right of freedom of speech for him is a fight not only for the right to

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meaning that which can be used to distinguish a particular group. It was also used by philosophers such as Paul Celan to develop notions of linguistic nationalism.

Boaz Levin, 'Say Shibboleth!—An Introduction by Boaz Levin', *Say Shibboleth! On Visible and Invisible Borders*, (Hohenems: the Jewish Museum, 2018), 10.

[26] For example in *Conflicted Phonemes and The Freedom of Speech Itself (2012)*.

http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/the-freedom-of-speech-itself/

[27] Ibid., 215.

[28] Ibid., 216.

speak, but for the conditions under which one may be heard, and should include the right for silence. His challenging of the legitimacy and objectivity of disembodied voice recordings, and of the transference of listening into the hands of machines, could be interpreted as a call for embodied, subjective, and relational forms of listening and for listening as testimony, which connects us back to the validity of forms of embodied and situated knowledge I discussed in previous chapters. [29]

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[29] Fragments from a conversation between Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Maayan Sheleff are in the appendices to this thesis to further contextualize his work in the frame of this research.

Truth is Concrete, Graz, 2012

Curators: Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza

Fig 48. *Truth is Concrete* (Graz, 2012)*.* Photo: Thomas Raggam

Fig 50. Reverend Billy at *Truth is Concrete* (Graz, 2012)*.* Photo: Thomas Raggam

Fig 51. Final Assembly at *Truth is Concrete* (Graz, 2012)*.* Photo: Wolfgang Silveri

Artists/curators: Jonas Staal in collaboration with Florian Malzacher

Fig 52. Training *Beyond Welcome - Agitprop for the Future* by Arrivati (La Toya Manly-Spain & Asuquo Udo) / Schwabinggrad Ballett (Nikola Duric & Liz Rech). Photo: Ruben Hamelink

Fig 53. Training *Choreographies of Togetherness* by Public Movement (Ma'ayan Choresh & Hagar Ophir). Photo: Ruben Hamelink

Fig 54. General assembly. Photo: Ruben Hamelink

Fig 55. Training *Intimacy Encryption* by Irational (Heath Bunting). Photo:
Ruben Hamelink

Voice Over, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, Holland, 2020-2021

Curator: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 56. Shilpa Gupta, Words Come from Ears (2018), motion flap board.

Photo: Pat Verbruggen

Fig 57. Shilpa Gupta, A Liquid, the Mouth Froze (2018), cast of open mouth in gun metal, etched brass plate, 17.5x11x18.5 cm. Photo: Pat Verbruggen

Fig 58. Shilpa Gupta, Words Come from Ears and A Liquid, the Mouth Froze (2018), Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 59. Effi and Amir, Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions (2020), mixed media, still from video

Fig 60. Effi and Amir, Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions (2020), mixed
media, installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht,
2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 61. Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou Rhame, At those terrifying frontiers
where the existence and disappearance of people fade into each other
(2017), Single channel video, 2-channel sound, 8 min 6 sec, still from video

Fig 62. Amir Yatziv, It's Like Being Lost in a Hall of Mirrors (2020), live
simulation CGI, Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum,
Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 63. Katarina Zdjelar, Reading 'Europe Where Have You Displaced Love?'
(2019), single-channel video, 29 min 26 sec, Installation view in *Voice Over*,
Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 64. Domenico Mangano & Marieke van Rooy, When the Whistle Glares
(2019), single channel video, 50 min, from The Dilution Project, installation
view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo:
Maayan Sheleff

Fig 65. Yusra Abu Kaf, Silence (2019), single channel video, 2 min 55 sec*,
still from video

Fug 66. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, This whole time there were no landmines (2017), 8 video loops on monitors with sound, Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

8. It's not my party but I'll cry if I want to

My late grandmother used to tell me that if I didn't remember something, it meant that it was not important enough. I used to get annoyed by this assumption, but I've learned to appreciate it with time. When she didn't remember who I was anymore, I just held her hand and played her favourite music—Vivaldi, the Four Seasons, Spring. I wanted her to enjoy the moment because the moment is all she had.[1]

My own memory is not that sharp. I always regret not writing a detailed diary of impressions like the ones I made when I was a kid; to write while I'm experiencing exhibitions, or travelling, or meeting people, both in professional and personal contexts, which for me are always entangled. I want to remember every detail of moments that I was touched by; what made me angry, what made me happy, what gave me a new understanding and what confused me. At the same time, I've learned to understand that what stays with me at the end, what I do remember, even if I remember it wrong, is what has value for me.

When I visited documenta fifteen, I was already in the last stages of writing this thesis. I didn't intend to write about it, but my experience of visiting there resonated with so many of the complexities that I had written about over the years, that it felt like I almost didn't have a choice. Since the whole experience

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[1] Segments from this chapter were part of an article I wrote for *OnCurating* as a report of the workshop I curated with Tanya Abraham for documenta fifteen:

Tanya Abraham and Maayan Sheleff, 'Reflections on the Workshop "Untitled (Re-curating documenta fifteen)"', https://on-curating.org/issue-54.html#.ZEN7Z-xBxQI

left me quite confused, I had to tackle and untangle the emotional residue. I decided to start with a report on where my own curatorial practice engaged and intervened with the curatorial concept of documenta fifteen—the workshop 'Untitled (Re-curating documenta fifteen)', organised by Tanya Abraham and myself for OnCurating's Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education summer school.[2] In curating the workshop, I situated myself in a position between curator and participant, a position to which I was not officially invited. The aim of the workshop was to 'recurate' documenta fifteen as an embodied experience, situated in the personal knowledges of the workshop participants. It treated the curatorial choices and texts of ruangrupa and their associates as raw materials. By adding layers of meaning and offering possibilities of interpretation, we were hinting as to how the workshop could communise the curatorial act further than its own intentions and questioning whether any curatorial narrative is inherently hierarchical.

The workshop participants were asked to choose in advance one of the works presented as part of documenta fifteen. The choices produced an impromptu route, which the workshop participants followed and walked through together. Stopping next to every chosen work, the participants gave their personal narration of the work, as an alternative to the curatorial text. The spoken interpretations were recorded and posted online, accumulating into an archive of a collectively guided exhibition tour.[3]

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[2] Curating on the move, Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education Summer School and Public Talk series 23 June – 7 July 2022 at CAMP notes on education, documenta fifteen, Kassel, Germany. https://www.curating.org/commoning-curatorial-and-artistic-education/ Accessed 4 June, 2023.

[3] https://soundcloud.com/maayan-sheleff Accessed 4 June, 2023.

When Tanya Abraham and I planned the workshop, we were attempting to respond to the curatorial concept of documenta fifteen around the notion of the *lumbung*, in a manner which extends it and examines its boundaries, as it was described as a collective effort.[4] By offering different narratives from the point of view of the audience and the artworks that they selected as personal mementos, we stretched further the democratic premise and promise of the curatorial concept of *lumbung* as a common space to share ideas and (hi)stories and as a collective curatorial endeavour;[5] we took the liberties of the

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[4] 'For ruangrupa, lumbung is not a concept, but a practice. This practice changes dynamically through interactions between people. Therefore, documenta fifteen is not theme-based. It is not about lumbung, but it evolves together with lumbung. documenta fifteen is practicing lumbung. This affects the artistic process, which is shaped collectively.'"https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung/ Accessed 8 April, 2023.

[5] 'lumbung is the Indonesian word for a communal rice barn, where the surplus harvest is stored for the benefit of the community. The lumbung practice enables an alternative economy of collectivity, shared resource building, and equitable distribution. Lumbung is anchored in the local and based on values such as humour, generosity, independence, transparency, sufficiency, and regeneration.After ruangrupa was invited to be the Artistic Direction of documenta fifteen, the collective, in turn, invited documenta to be part of its *ekosistem*. To this end, ruangrupa then established ruruHaus in Kassel as a local meeting point, living room, and laboratory. The collective is engaging intensively with Kassel's ekosistem. Not only during but also leading up to and beyond the hundred days of the exhibition. Thus, in addition to the development of new sustainability models, the establishment of lasting relationships is at the core of this documenta.'

https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/lumbung/ Accessed 8 April, 2023.

delegated and decentralised authorship that was extended by ruangrupa to specific artists and artist collectives and used it for noninvited audiences; this was thus both an act of care and appreciation for the curatorial concept, by resonating it further, as well as a gently conflictual nudge to probe how inclusive the documenta's curatorial concept actually was and towards whom. The tour that was created and collectively guided formed a participatory embodied account of the exhibition.[6] As these voices were recorded and uploaded online, people who could not visit the exhibition could listen to them and shape their own interpretation of the works, imagining what they looked like from hearing someone describe them which could, in turn, open additional layers of interpretations.

Tanya and I developed the workshop in relation to both of our curatorial practices and research, around forms of participation and collaboration. This reflection upon our experience in two voices is part of the fragmented coauthorship, which like every collaboration is full of holes, questions and fractures, in terms of how decisions are being made and what is the place of every voice. For me, the term collaboration is always problematic, as it implies

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[6] Some of the workshop participants gave other contexts and extended information on the works from their unique knowledges. Others mentioned what they experienced when the works were activated differently on other days, enhancing the documenta's ability to shape shift and produce multiple viewing experiences; yet others told how the work made them feel, how it connected to their own personal contexts and what memories it triggered. While this iteration of the workshop was conducted with mostly artists, curators and MA and PhD students, impacting on the type and width of knowledge and input, any other group would have produced a valuable body of knowledge with its own merit. Thus the workshop proposes itself as a model, which could be reproduced by other audiences in other exhibitions.

that a consensus could be reached without coercing one voice to accept the point of view of another. I prefer participation, which invites deconstruction and allows conflicts to unfold without self-destruction. For me, the workshop is part of ongoing attempts to practice an embodied, performative and at times personal position; looking to connect to others to create a fragmented collectivity, a disruption of normative perceptions of kinship, where the individual voice is present and differentiated amongst others. This complexity, which existed between Tanya and me and in the workshop, and is present throughout this thesis, mirrored and echoed the lager complexities of the curatorial methodology of documenta fifteen, in ways that we only later began to grasp.

As mentioned previously, the workshop put an emphasis on people who came in as audience, not as invited artists-activists-participants. When we planned it, I couldn't have predicted how my own experience as an audience member would enact a certain complexity, read through the lens of the participatory intentions and their aftermath. While I'm not able to give a full report here of the various projects that were shown at documenta fifteen and their participatory or nonparticipatory intentions, I'd like to foreground my contradictory experiences of the exhibition, which shifted between a generous sense of welcoming and care and a certain inaccessibility within participatory forms and formats.

Documenta fifteen feels impossible to write about and yet so many words have been written about it. Documenta is a huge endeavour, with a robust history that has shaped the more critical and academic strand of the art world and discourse over the years; to add to the complexity, this fifteenth version of documenta was overshadowed by a chain of conflictual events that attracted much more attention than the complex and beautiful works or the radical and

intricately conducted curatorial methodology.[7] For me, what signifies more than anything else the seductive elusiveness of documenta fifteen could be

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[7] From Eyal Weizman's article about his visit to documenta fifteen:

> Documenta, held every five years in Kassel, is the world's most influential show of contemporary art. On 19 June, a day after the opening, an eight-metre-high banner titled People's Justice, painted by the Indonesian art collective Taring Padi, was hung from a scaffold in Friedrichsplatz, Kassel's central square. It was a massive piece of agitprop, a cartoon-like version of a Diego Rivera mural, depicting perpetrators and victims of the Suharto regime, beginning with the genocidal campaign of 1965–66 against real and imagined members of the Indonesian Communist Party, leftists and ethnic Chinese. The banner was intended as a people's tribunal, a calling to account. Taring Padi were student protesters in 1998, when a popular uprising—and bloody street fighting—finally brought Suharto down. They lost many friends to the violence.People's Justice, created in 2002, was their collective response. It has been exhibited internationally several times, but until its unveiling in Kassel, no one seemed to have noticed that of the hundreds of figures in the painting, two were clearly antisemitic. There was outrage, and the banner was removed two days later. Many in the media celebrated the defeat of postcolonialism and declared the entire exhibition a national embarrassment. Some demanded the end of Documenta altogether. The German president, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, responded by warning 'there are limits' to artistic freedom when it comes to political issues. Chancellor Scholz announced that for the first time in thirty years he wouldn't be going to the show. The culture minister, Claudia Roth, promised more state control. Finally, on 16 July,documenta's director, Sabine Schormann, resigned by 'mutual agreement' with the supervisory board.

expressed via the term 'hearsay'. There seems to be no 'fact' that can be verified without being confronted by a counter 'fact' from another perspective, no narrative that doesn't have an opposing one, no story that is not contradicted. It seems to be the symbolic epitome of a mega exhibition in the age of post-truth, with a methodology engaging both conceptually and literally with protest movements, a post-colonial approach that encountered a backlash of identity politics, and a battle between situated embodied experiences to fake news and political agendas. It seems to hold together all the complexities that I write about in this thesis, and while the curators describe their methodology as collective, for me it questions the borders between participation and collaboration, as well as the clashes between solidarity, care and control in curating.

It is not my purpose here to discuss in depth what has been unofficially termed the 'scandal' and the responses to it, nor to give another critique of documenta fifteen in regard to it being antisemitic or not. Not because I think it is not important or problematic, but because I would like to look at the whole thing from another perspective, one that deconstructs the participatory aspect of the exhibition through an embodied memory of my own participation. One that respects and lovingly resonates the caring acts of the curators and artists involved, as well as acknowledges potential blind spots. While the set of responses to the unfolding of the dramatic events was often emotional, for me these emotions resonated well after my visit, and thus my account here is somewhat emotional as well. In the spirit of the embodied feminist traditions

Eyal Weizman, 'in Kassel', *London Review of Books*, vol. 44 no. 15, (4 August, 2022), https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v44/n15/eyal-weizman/in-kassel Accessed 3 April, 2023.

that I have written about earlier in the thesis, my report is based on my own experience as well as on information I gathered through informal conversations with artists, curators, education guides and mediators, from euphoric Instagram posts to sad and tired open letters. When I officially refer to someone else's article or critique to explain the events, or to strengthen or counter my own position, I do so in the footnotes. I'm aware that even the 'official' renditions I chose are situated accounts, and that there are those who would have described it differently.

When I visited documenta fifteen it was a few days after the 'scandal' had begun to unfold. The exhibition felt like a huge creature with various organs functioning separately, yet together creating a whole. This creature had a mood; when I was there, it felt like the creature was sad and exhausted, as if all the euphoria that overflowed in the opening days disintegrated into the depressing day after affect, when Covid-19 awakened and accusations accumulated.[8] As the scandal evolved around accusations of antisemitism towards the curators, related to some of the artworks and to the exclusion of Israeli artists from the exhibition,[9] the fact that I was Israeli and Jewish definitely

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[8] As one critic, Siddhartha Mitter, aptly described it in his title: 'Documenta was a whole vibe. Then a scandal killed the buzz', *Art Daily* (originally published in NY Times). https://artdaily.com/news/147639/Documenta-was-a-whole-vibe--Then-a-scandal-killed-the-buzz-#.ZCqPo-xBxQI Accessed 3 April, 2023.

[9] There were two main issues at hand here: the main controversy was antisemitic images in the work of Taring Pad, and the other, that probably resonated more in my own circles, was claims that Israeli artists were boycotted but that this was not officially declared. As I will not be able to go in depth into the political complexities here and all the various opposing positions, I would like to mention the particular sensitivities and complexities through two layered standpoints, that don't take sides

in a simplistic manner; one is Nora Sternfeld's, that on the one hand speaks about the racist and antisemitic history of documenta, emphasising why the antisemitic imagery is particularly triggering in this context, and on the other hand surveys ruangrupa's approach as antiracist and related to commoning. One example can be found in the lecture she gave in Manofim festival in Jerusalem:

https://manofim.org/harama/%d7%93%d7%95%d7%a7%d7%95%d7%9e%d7%a0%d7%98%d7%94-%d7%9b%d7%a0%d7%97%d7%9c%d7%aa-%d7%94%d7%9b%d7%9c%d7%9c/#.ZEN9texBxQI

Accessed 22 April, 2023.

The second position is Eyal Weizman's, giving a wider political context to the relation between ruangrupa and Taring Padi's anticolonial perspective, focusing on the compliance of the West in supporting Suharto's dictatorship in Indonesia. Weizman explains in depth the content and context of the aforementioned work, but at the same time acknowledges its indisputable antisemitic character, and the problematics of showing it in Germany in 2022, as a sort of return of the repressed. Weizman also renders other conflicts that led to this one, where earlier claims have been made that the documenta is antisemitic as it excludes Israeli artists and relates these claims to Islamophobic and anti-Palestinian agendas as well as to violent attacks on Palestinians as well as on Jews.

The artists and curators at Documenta have apologised and promised to learn from their mistakes. But their detractors in the German media and politics haven't begun to acknowledge, let alone unlearn, their own racist prejudices. Instead they have used the controversy as an opportunity to tell Palestinians and critical Jewish Israelis, as well as artists from the global south, that they have no right to speak out. Like the antisemitism that exists in anti-imperialist circles, the state-sponsored and openly Islamophobic persecution of artists and intellectuals in Germany falsely separates the entangled histories of racism and antisemitism, placing them in opposition to each other.

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didn't help me to feel welcome (even though there was an improvised sign that said 'Jews welcome' at the entrance to the ruruhouse). Despite the fact that I knew some of the curators and that I was a curator myself with similar interests and methodologies, and that our political positions were probably not so different, I felt that I was perceived—either by others or by myself, despite my will—as either a victim or a perpetrator, depending on which side one took. Or was this all in my head?

Anyway, it was the documenta, and I immediately went into a state of increased fomo, trying to catch anything that was still around, a performance, a party, something. But I seemed to keep missing everything—wherever I was, things were happening somewhere else, were cancelled, started late or early, were already finished or hadn't yet begun. I also wasn't sure about the whole participatory aspect of the exhibition: was it participatory for the audience or only the lumbung members? For example, it was great to have collective kitchens, but it was totally unclear to me whether these spaces were private or public and in what way. Were they part of the exhibition to be viewed, like performances, or should I perceive them as workshops that I could take part in? Or were they just a gathering place for the curators and their friends to cook and eat? I couldn't find answers to these questions anywhere, and even when I dared to ask people, I received opposing answers. Thus, I remained confused. Should I join? Can I get food? Do I need to pay for it? Is it vegan? Why isn't anybody looking at me? Should I introduce myself? Should I buy them beers? Should I ask where the party is? Is it only me that has all these questions while everyone else feels perfectly comfortable?

Eyal Weizman, 'In Kassel'.

After several days of increasing frustration, it dawned on me that even if I missed an event, even if I missed all of them, the spaces were activated all the time. As I was watching an artwork, I watched myself watching the audience watching the work; sometimes I watched the art mediators watching me watching the audience watching the works. I watched empty spaces that felt like a setting for a performance waiting to happen, activated with absence, or artworks that were activated by the listening and viewing of audiences. But this was not participation; it was something else.

I realised that while many works were participatory in the sense of involving communities, and the curatorial methodology could be defined as participatory due to delegated authorship, the exhibition's participatory aspect in terms of audience engagement was conflictual, and I'm still not sure if deliberately so or not. As such, a clear line was drawn between the mostly Western and white audience and the mostly non-Western participating artist and activist collectives and the communities they worked with. The line seemed to be hinting: do not cross. Do not touch. This is not your party. If you would like to experience the party as close as possible to the way the lumbung members experiences it, you will need to be privileged enough to be able to pay one hundred and twenty-five euros for a seasonal ticket. But you probably still won't get it.

Before it all began, ruangrupa were asked if they wanted to make a proposal as candidates for the position of documenta fifteen's curators. As the story goes, they asked a question in return: do you want to do the lumbung thing with

us?[10] Thus, the very premise of ruangrupa's curatorial positioning was an objection to the power relations within which the established Western institution of documenta is offering the non-Westerners an opportunity to share their knowledge, while the institution will then decide whether it is good enough. Instead, ruangrupa implied that they are going to do their thing anyway. The question was, if documenta was ready to do it as well.

The destabilisation of curatorial and institutional authority here was twofold—on the one hand, destabilisation of curatorial authorship by creating the collective of collectives, the lumbung, and collectively sharing the resources that the institution facilitates, and on the other hand, the undermining of documenta's control as a hegemonic institution.[11] Without getting too deeply

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[10] This story was repeated on various occasions and with variations. I heard it during a conversation with one of ruangrupa's members, Taring Padi, and Richard Bell as part of the event series in his embassy project.

[11] Oliver Marchart writes about the hegemonic power of mega exhibitions and particularly documenta, as well as their relation to Western notions of nation building:

> But above and beyond the creation of economic value on the local level, there is also the politics of the nation state. The policy of biennialization contributes not least of all to the construction of local, national, and continental identity. Its format is thus a direct descendant of the world fairs that supported the inner nation-building of colonial and industrial nations of the nineteenth century…Because on the one hand, major Western exhibitions serving the purpose of nation-building (and with it, implicitly, that of subject-building) bring tremendous symbolic, prestige-related, and infrastructural resources into play. In a sense, this makes of them giant ideology machines, or, more aptly, hegemony machines of the civil, national, occidental, or Europeanist dominant culture, as the case may be.

Oliver Marchart, *Hegenomy Machines: Documenta X to Fifteen and the Politics of Biennalization*, (Zurich and Berlin: OnCurating.org, 2022), 9–11.

In addition, Marchart explains more about ruangruapa's approach to sharing resources as a political act of commoning, and on their method of working collectively via extending invitations:

> ... documenta is seen as huge platform for sharing and redistributing resources. The political in documenta fifteen, it seems, is not so much a matter of conflict; it is a matter of the commons. But this impression should not deceive us. Many of the participating artist-activist groups are deeply involved in political conflicts back at home, and the communal, in the absence of other resources, is the main resource that allows them to sustain their struggle. There is nothing apolitical to this idea of "sharing"; rather, sharing is a precondition, in locally specific situations, for emancipatory political action, and documenta has been made a tool by ruangrupa to support these actions.

Marchart, *Hegenomy Machines,* 53–54.

> Ruangrupa explain their collective methodology: "'First, we invited Documenta to become our ecosystem at the beginning of our journey. Once we had its willingness to embark on this journey with us, we extended invitations: first, to the people who we imagined could work with us closely from the get-go—they are what we call the artistic team. Next, we invited practices, initiatives, and collectives that we want to learn from. We announced 14 of them as "lumbung inter-lokal" to the public. Right after that, and continuously learning from the processes we had gone through, we thought about other collaborators that would enrich the celebration we understood as Documenta 15—artists, educators, designers, economists, radio stations, the list goes on.'"

> Politics is always a collective enterprise, and a political way of curating should therefore also be collective. But there are many ways of acting collectively, from

into the genealogy of the scandals,and remembering again that every perspective, including my own, is partial and biased, my point here is that one of the reasons the whole thing spiralled out of control is that the concept deliberately and inherently undermined any form of control. However, as ruangrupa delegated authority in such a substantial way, they didn't only give up control, but also in some cases inadvertently gave up care.[12]

the documenta-council of early documenta shows via the team structures of D11 and documenta 14 to ruangrupa, the first collective to be named artistic director of documenta. But what is the specific kind of collectivity ruangrupa engages with? Their curatorial work, as it becomes evident from the above quote, should be understood as first and foremost a practice of invitation: an invitation to enter one of these concentric circles and share a common space of solidarity and shared resources. This is a curatorial practice by which collectives are mutually enriched and expanded without losing their local specificity. And it is a curatorial practice that allows for a global outlook, by way of cascading invitations and pluri-directional connections, without presuming a bird's eye-view on the planet. Some curators may still pretend otherwise, but there is no way to organize a non-Western centric show other than collectively.

Marchart, *Hegenomy Machines,* 57.

[12] A kindred perspective could be found in Kim Córdova's account:

…Their collective-of-collectives lumbung framework dispensed with hierarchical organizational structures as an ideological stance. But curating by delegated committee, or what artist and curator Mohammad Salemy has likened to a Decentralized Autonomous Organization, created a Jesus-take-the-wheel rookie mistake of participatory action, proving that, as on the internet, Godwin's law applies to the world's foremost exhibitions of contemporary art. With estimates of around 1,500 artists credited as

participating in Documenta 15, the scale and the distribution of responsibility and accountability made it all but guaranteed an offensive work would slip through the cracks. For many, the resulting central display of a work bearing anti-Semitic imagery ultimately made the strongest case for what ruangrupa's lumbung was meant to be an alternative to—centralized curatorial authority… Journalistic integrity holds that if I'm to write about a work I need to experience it, so here's where I have to come clean. I can't write about the most important part of Documenta 15 or INLAND's participation in it because the whole point of this edition is public programming, and I wasn't there for it. Welcome to the shadow side of the lumbung.

A central aim of ruangrupa and INLAND's work is a desire to square off with capitalism's orientation to time and geography as device of value extraction. Both have been clear that their interest is in building community, activism, and experimental inquiry. Objects on display, which most people equate with capital-A art, here are really just pretext. So, with the true focus on public programming and participatory action, none of which had yet to transpire during the press week, all the presentations were somewhere between zero and roughly eighty-seven percent ready, depending on what one considers "the work." The effect was the feeling of arriving to social-justice art summer camp, but a week too early and not necessarily invited…Documenta 15, also known as Lumbung 1, was not designed for the press or the regular crowd of art industry insiders. That was a big part of what made it so refreshing. But as the hundred days of nongkrong, or "collective hanging out," wear on, it's becoming less and less clear who exactly it was designed for. After all, it's not just members of the press who can't afford to dedicate a summer to attending public programming far from home. INLAND does make a gesture toward inclusion by offering videos of their panels on YouTube. But the video of the first panel again highlights questions of access and audience. The hour-long handheld cellphone-recorded video shows about six people attending a talk with chairs for roughly twelve out in front of the

From conversations I had, it seems that the lack of care was felt by some of the participating artists, by partially involved participants such as myself as well as by random audience members. For example, some of the artists told me that they didn't feel cared for, because while everybody was dealing with 'the scandal', their works didn't get any attention; others felt that they were silenced as they were told not to talk to the press about the events; yet others were afraid that violence would be directed against them, as there were violent incidents against some of the participating artists when the controversy began to unfold. Also, an artist was angry that the label for their work was not there, as it was completely forgotten with all the drama. This thing with the label might seem trivial, but it reminded me that I had another issue with the accessibility of the curatorial concept and the way in which it was mediated: why were the texts either forty centimetres or two metres high? Was I supposed to either kneel in front of the mighty art to understand it, or alternatively to read it from a position of a minion worshiping its artsy god? Watching elderly Germans

Natural History Museum. At one point, a man off-camera, who sounds sincerely interested, tries to join the audience listening to the conversation between García-Dory and ruangrupa member Farid Rakun. García-Dory patiently explains to the man that since he's not part of the INLAND academy he can't stay. The exchange heightened the sense that in this edition the participating collective-of-collectives are both the artists and their own audience, making this Documenta structurally more insular than it alleges. In this light, the kumbaya rhetoric provokes questions about how much inclusivity is necessary to count as community engagement.

Kim Córdova, 'Field Notes: on INLAND at Documenta 15', *e-flux Education,* (July, 2022) https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/481113/field-notes-kim-crdova-on-inland-at-documenta-15/ Accessed 3 April, 2022.

struggling with this oddity, I asked myself whether this was a deliberate pun; an emphasised gesture of inaccessibility, meant to accentuate the superfluousness of a curatorial explanation; a bug intended to create confusion, even frustration among the audience, in order to declare the exhibition as belonging solely to the lumbung members; to those who were invited and who could develop long-term relations. Everybody else would embody their own exclusion. But this sort of antagonism felt alien to ruangrupa's caring approach as they communicated it, and as it was manifested in many of the projects. It was not only the content of the projects that put an emphasis on care (for communities, for human rights, for the planet), but also the methodology.[13] I was still confused. As I was part of a group of

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[13] My PhD peer, Sascia Bailer, had an interesting perspective on the caring aspects of the curatorial methods of ruangrupa, which she shared in a series of Instagram posts. I particularly found interest in her perspective on the generous aspects of the curatorial mediation, suggesting that while some aspects of the show seemed less accessible, others were doing the opposite: not only did the artistic collective ruangrupa, as curators of #documentafifteen, dedicate an entire room to their working methods, but also many other collective practices included statements on their working methods, their codes of conduct, their strategies, or at times, even the making of their films. This counters the claims of *art pour l´art*, where context, process, or the work´s mediation are considered irrelevant as the work is to speak for itself. However, for the mainly socially engaged practices that are presented at documenta fifteen, the context is indispensible—it is where its urgency emerges. It also implies a reflective layer that goes beyond the final art object/project, and rather encompasses the ways in which people relate to one another, how power and budgets are redistributed, how (marginalised) communities and friendships are not modes of cementing the status quo but of circumventing it. The including of not only the 'what' but also the 'how' becomes a political tool that highlights the importance of

curatorial MA students and PhD candidates who held workshops and talks in collaboration with documenta, we had the privilege of hearing some insider perspectives. During our workshop with the art mediators, or as they were termed *sobat-sobat*,[14] other problematic aspects exposed themselves in more than one conversation. In our group, there was an art mediator who kept saying fuck all the time, and instead of mediating the works went on about her horrible working conditions and how she in fact didn't know anything about the works. She said that she was part of a group that was invited for a workshop to develop new methods of art mediation, but when she had a suggestion, it was ignored. She complained that she used her free time to fish for private customers for extra cash outside of her official schedule, because her fee was so low. Finally, she asked why should she be a *sobat*—a friend—to perfect strangers? She

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the politics of artistic and activist practices. By making them transparent they also allow other practitioners to learn from them; this is a way of communalising knowledge and skills. And while #OliverMarchart2 argues that this iteration of documenta is not driven by theory, I claim: these methods—as a linkage between theory and practice—might not be derived from Western, canonical theories but are rather generative of future theories around socially engaged artistic and curatorial practices.

Sascia Bailer https://www.instagram.com/p/Cfw2R2no1nf/ Accessed 12 April, 2022.

[14] 'lumbung is based on friendship. In Indonesian, sobat means friend or companion. The plural form is sobat-sobat. As friends, the art mediators sobat-sobat accompany visitors on guided tours through the documenta fifteen exhibition. These exhibition tours are called Walks and Stories and form part of lumbung knowledge. As an active part of lumbung knowledge visitors and art mediators alike create encounters and access through their practice of storytelling.'

https://documenta-fifteen.de/en/glossary/?entry=sobat Accessed 8 April, 2023.

thought that she should teach them, not befriend them. She didn't get the concept.

If I juxtapose my own experience with that of the art mediator and some of the artists, as well as with other visitors in various degrees of involvement, I can deduce that the nonhierarchical collective curation, for some, did not result in a feeling of inclusiveness, safety or care. There were different degrees of engagement between the audience, which as stated previously was mostly Western, and the invited artists, collectives and the communities who were mostly from what is sometimes termed (despite its problematics as ruangrupa noted on several occasions), the Global South. The invited artists were part of a collective decision-making process and the sharing of resources, resulting in the exhibition of numerous multilayered approaches to activist participation of communities in situated contexts, appealing in their inventive use of political imagination and performative documentaries; in that sense, ruangrupa successfully posed another stepping stone in the contemporary traditions of the more political Documenta iterations;[15] on the other hand, the participation

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[15] Oliver Marchart wrote extensively about the political (or nonpolitical) aspects in the various Documenta editions:

> Starting with Catherine David's dX of 1997 and Okwui Enwezor's D11 of 2002, the following will take a closer look at how counter-canonization and hegemonic shifts can be advanced using the appropriated institutional means of the apparatus itself. The dX and D11 symbolically condensed an already latent shift of canons into a rupture in the art field, by all means with progressive effect… Particularly D11 represented this multiple radicalization of exhibition strategies in the form of an intensified politicization, a decentering of the West, an uncompromising theorization, and a targeted emphasis on education work—strategies that were re-deployed, in various

of the audience often remained on the level of spectatorship; sometimes it felt like it literally manifested a colonial gaze, because of the aforementioned identity positioning.[16] While it seems attempts were made to offer more direct

ways and with changing emphasis (as much as with advances and setbacks), in subsequent documenta shows… The 2017 documenta 14, with Adam Szymczyk as artistic director, was in many respects the absolute antidote to dOCUMENTA (13). There was no attempt to please the public or the critics Politics was again moved centercentre stage, starting with the decision to partially move documenta to Athens at the moment of what used to be euphemistically called the Greek 'debt crisis'… In this respect, documenta fifteen, curated by the art collective ruangrupa in 2022, continued this political trend, yet gave it a more collectivized and practical spin by inviting mostly other collectives and by focusing on the re-distribution of resources…But while ideas about what is political have changed in documenta fifteen, it does stand in the tradition of a clearly political show. A tradition, within the cosmos of documenta, reaching back to dX and D11, not to speak of other axes of the 'contemporary,' such as a global outlook and an emphasis on education.

Marchart, *Hegenomy Machines,* 13–16.

[16] I use the term 'identity positioning' here, to relate to the reaction of the participants, myself included, and not to describe ruangrupa's curatorial approach as advocating identity politics in the simplistic sense. Marchart refers later to this subject:

This is certainly not the anti-identitarian politics conjured up in documenta 14, nor should it be confused, on the other hand, with a simple kind of identity politics. The invited artists and activists (and often archivists) do work politically in locally specific contexts, and most of them also work collectively. For instance, the Archive des Luttes des Femmes en Algérie, which emerged from the 'Hirak' popular uprising in 2019, collects documents about feminist collectives and struggles in Algeria; the Off-Biennale Budapest seeks to

participation, for example in various workshops, talks or in the collective kitchens, these seemed to have been communicated ambiguously, resulting in conflicting moments of confusion as to whom the invitation is extended and to what level, as I have described before.

However, perhaps this conflictuality—the confusion, discomfort and awkwardness that these subtle forms of exclusion caused to arise, whether intended by the organisers or not—is where the power of documenta fifteen lies. Taking control from those who are used to it and delegating it to others who are not, is an essential way of rerouting to something different. As aforesaid, the entire concept of lumbung was an invitation for documenta to let go of its control, and confusion is inevitably a part of letting go. The interest for ruangrupa lies not in audience participation but in utilising its resources to develop long-term relations between the collectives, artists and activists involved. If we treat this as hacking the systems of mega exhibitions, perhaps it's not only subverting the idea of art as a spectacle by showing things that don't look like art, but also by not offering the audience the pacifying position of partial participation that has become increasingly trendy over the last two decades. Thus, they accentuate the still unequal power relations between the West and the Global South and turn it on its head. In addition, when one is not invited, one wants to be part of the club even more, so if we read the

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defend artistic and political freedom under Orban's authoritarian rule; the *foundation-Class* collective was founded at the Weißensee Kunsthochschule Berlin to allow for refugees to enter art school. It seems as if the curatorial collective ruangrupa tried to bring together groups and initiatives at the art-community-politics nexus similar to ruangrupa itself.

Marchart, *Hegenomy Machines,* 68.

nonparticipatory aspects from this position, we might imagine that they could move people to get more involved in artistic-activist collectives in their own localities, because political art has never looked like so much fun.[17]

I remember that I really wanted to be a part of that party, but memories are tricky. In that moment with my grandmother, which I recalled while visiting documenta, we connected through a shared memory of music that we listened to together when I was a child. Perhaps our ears have better abilities than our eyes, in provoking memories, feelings, and with them evoking embodied criticality, as I have pondered in earlier chapters of this thesis. There were many speaking subjects and voices that documenta fifteen amplified and resonated,

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[17] Marchart says:

> The edition of documenta fifteen—which is no less political than documenta 14—is characterized by yet another change of mood. The world has not changed for the better, to be sure, but in documenta fifteen, politics is understood in a strikingly different way from previous editions. Already the pop-ish design portrays a more joyous and playful approach deeply submerged in global popular culture. The political is now envisaged as the common and the communal. The curatorial philosophy behind this idea of politics is condensed in the vocabulary of ruangrupa as it is explained in a glossary: the most important term is lumbung, the Indonesian word for a collectively used rice barn. The modality of sharing, which underlies the lumbung community, is supposed to be guided by values such as generosity, humor, local rootedness, independence, regeneration, transparency, and frugality.

Marchart, *Hegenomy Machines,* 67.

some that in other contexts are silences and marginalised.[18] Many works seemed to have asked about forms of listening or offered sonic solidarities. At the same time, within the exhibition's radical participatory approach, as I have shown, there were voices that were excluded from the conversation, and bodies that felt uncared for. While I'm still processing these contradictions, I can sense the transformative power of this experience, and hope that the conflicts will lead to new meeting points between participation and activism, rather than to a backlash in the form of censorship and limitations of radical experimental participatory curatorial endeavours.[19]

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[18] This platform is too limited to discuss them but I would like to mention some of the artists and artist collectives that exhibited impressive works in the context of voice and sound that I was immensely touched by, among them Wakaliwood, Black Quantum Futurism, Yasmine Eid-Sabbagh, Komina Film a Rojava, Sada, Cao Minghao & Chen Jianjun, Madeyoulook, FAFSWAG, Instituto de Artivismo Hannah Arendt, Trampoline House and others.

[19] In an interview after the documenta had closed, Ade Darmawan, a member of ruangrupa, spoke on behalf of the group on the reaction of the art world to their concept and on their notions of safety and care:

> We've been surprised at how the art world has shown itself to be the most conservative of places. But to some extent the pushback was unsurprising. Most Western art institutions have been colonised to such an extent—from education to business models—so when different voices are in charge it becomes a threat. Ruangrupa represents a very different way of doing things and the fact that this show was about placing things into practice, rather than sloganeering, was a real threat to certain authorities—be they museum directors, art market players or even politicians…

From the outset we've made clear that lumbung isn't merely a theme, but rather a form of practice we have undertaken for many years, and one that comes from an embodied local tradition. It is meant to be enacted, and we feel we have definitely achieved that. We extended this exhibition to incorporate lots of grassroots models that are geared towards art education and activism. It was definitely a real challenge to get all these critical voices together. As was establishing safe spaces for our artists…If you conceive of Documenta just as the 100-day exhibition itself, we did not achieve a safe space. But if we look at this show as a journey, we think initiatives like the setting up of Ruruhaus [a cultural centre-cum-living room in a department store in central Kassel] played a really important role in allowing people to rest and find safety. There is a time factor here—the emergence of safe spaces won't happen within the timeframe of the biennial model. But Documenta 15 provided several spaces that were living spaces, where you could find artists just being themselves and blurring the lines between artistic practice and living. But yes, we live in a violent society and although we tried to establish groups to report and counteract incidents of racism, we don't know if we really succeeded there.

…it's something of a trap to say that what happened was entirely because of our curatorial model…we think that the fallout raised important questions: Can we change control with trust? Can we adapt hierarchy structures to create another meaning of responsibility? And yes, that approach always comes with a degree of risk. But we knew this, we even wrote that in our handbook, which was made public prior to the exhibition's opening. Mistakes, trials and errors do occur with experiments. Moreover, we think there were people who wanted this exhibition to fail. Well before the show opened there was a microscope on us, and the issue was in some ways pre-concluded. That there has been so much fixation on certain issues has unfortunately taken away a lot of energy from artistic direction—at times it felt like we were

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As a curator based in Israel, I had my own inner conflict—a struggle between the curator working with (conflictual) participation, feeling that this exhibition was everything that she ever dreamed of, to someone who felt like they crashed a party they weren't invited to. But maybe that was exactly the point? When the curatorial approach is supposedly based on friendship, one can't be friends with everybody.[20] In a private conversation with two colleagues in the context of the curatorial approach of an art institution with an anticolonial perspective,

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being asked to fix Germany. This show was largely covered by this one issue of antisemitism, but that was so different from what was happening on the ground. This Documenta is for the people not politicians.…We don't think we can work within neoliberal infrastructures, whether that be Western institutions or major shows in places like Singapore. Instead, we should now focus on making our own communities, which is something that we've begun through the majelis at Documenta. Developing knowledge within its own ecosystem is much more interesting—and important—to us. We think we've realised fully that ruangrupa's working structure is not adaptable to big 'dinosaur' institutions like, say, Tate. We can only change superficial things there. This will be the last institutional thing we do. As a collective, we have an internal institutional system as well, and that is much more rewarding to nurture.

Kabir Jhala, '"Germany Has Cancelled Us": As Embattled Documenta 15 Closes, Its Curators ruangrupa Reflect On The Exhibition—And What They Would Have Done Differently', *The Art Newspaper*, (22 September, 2022) https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2022/09/22/documenta-15-closes-curators-ruangrupa-exhibition-kassel Accessed 12 April, 2022.

[20] Ruangrupa spoke in various contexts about how their curatorial methodology is to make friends. One example can be found here in my conversation with Farid Rakun from Ruangrupa for OnCurating: https://www.curating.org/farid-rakun/

one of the speakers claimed that the approach is exclusionary as it focuses on specific Pan-African communities. The other speaker said that it is in fact inclusionary, if those who are finally not at the centre of the focus are ok with it. In that sense, if we take this to the realm of documenta fifteen, the exclusion is not really an exclusion if it is meant for the ones who are used to being in control.

In a conversation between Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński and Nora Sternfeld,[21] they discussed antiracist curating as a mode in which there is significant participation which blurs boundaries; where the invited are contributors and the inviting conductors, rather than a representational participation meant to pacify calls for integration of marginal voices; where there is a critical engagement with the structures of an institution and a redistribution of resources; a changing of the infrastructure and methods; self-reflexivity and self-criticality; and a 'joyful spirit of resistance'—the use of humour instead of fear and shock. All of this can be found in ruangruapa's documenta fifteen. However, in another article in the same publication, Christopher Wessels, Marianne Niemel And Ahmed Al-Nawas discussed the significance of space, and how in order to be antiracist one needs to 'consider how to act "decolonially" in a space, given that space is never neutral…In order to work towards breaking hierarchies, or at least making them visible in the space… one needs to acknowledge the privileges that exist within it'.[22] In that

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[21] Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński and Nora Sternfeld ,'Where's the Contact Zone Here?! A Conversation', in *Curating as Anti-Racist Practice*, eds Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, Nora Sternfeld, Aalto ARTS Books, 2018, 25–34.

[22] Christopher Wessels, Marianne Niemel. And Ahmed Al-Nawas*, We Do Encourage Promiscuity, But This is Not a Motel. Anti-Racist Curatorial Strategies From the*

sense, it seems that ruangrupa have not considered all the specific power relations that exist in a mega exhibition situated in a public square in Kassel, Germany, 2022.

The remaining question, which is central to this thesis, is how to take part when everything falls apart. Perhaps the only thing left to do is cry. I cried at least three times in documenta fifteen. Once because of a song in an artwork. The second time was because I felt helpless and sad due to the violence conducted by my country and reflected in some of the artworks, and there seemed to have been no places or possibility to speak about that. The third time was because of the kindness and empathy of one stranger who said that no one should cry because of their identity. But I still did.

8.1 Conclusion

> …while in the best case scenario we might defeat the colonizers, what do we do
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> with the colonization within ourselves? This question is at the heart of any desire for radical change. And I think we can only confront it if we understand that it is not only great gestures that thwart the reproduction of social relations of violence, but also small steps. Precisely because it's also about the hopes, dreams, desires and visions of anti-racist curators themselves, because it's also about their anger and their self-hatred, the extent to which they/we can rely on their/our intuition is limited—and yet, there is nothing else that they/we can rely on… It is

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Margins to the Centre, in Curating as Anti-Racist Practice, eds. Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, Nora Sternfeld, Aalto ARTS Books, 2018, 86–87.

therefore crucial to remain attentive to the narratives that have been planted within ourselves, to continuously work with and against these narratives, in order not to also remain stuck in monological, linear and simplified structures. It's important to take this desire as a starting point, to explore its ambivalence, to use it to continually resist mental colonization… In summary, anti-racist curating—or, in other words, curating aiming to disrupt discrimination and related conditions of injustice—is always a break with the heteronormative, classic, ableist, racist status quo that we find embodied in the world and in our selves. [23]

I don't like endings, so I must admit I feared reaching the conclusion of this thesis. It also has to do with the fact that I don't have concrete answers, thus the conclusion is more of an inconclusive, temporary position, which emphasises the questions that were asked, some of which remain in flux. Perhaps that is the right state of mind for a thesis that tackles the entanglement between the personal and the professional as embodied criticality in both curating and research.[24]

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[23] Nora Sternfeld, in a converstioan with Natalie Bayer and Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński, 'Where's the Contact Zone Here?! A Conversation', in *Curating as Anti-Racist Practice,* Natalie Bayer, Belinda Kazeem-Kamiński and Nora Sternfeld, eds., (Helsinki: Aalto ARTS Books, 2018) 35–38.

[24] As I have mentioned before, I relate throughout the thesis to thinkers that encourage an embodied position in regard to research and curation. Among them are Donna Haraway in 'Situated Knowledges', calling for embodied local accounts that regain agency through collectivity (1988); Irit Rogoff's notions of 'smuggling' and 'embodied criticality' as a state of frustration and heightened awareness with transformative powers (2006). More recently, Rogoff is developing the terms 'the

In this thesis, titled *Echoing with a Difference—Curating Voices and the Politics of Participation*, I have explored how participatory artistic and curatorial practices in the last decade embody and voice conflicts. I have examined the relations between the protest movements that began in 2011, after the global economic crises of 2007–8, and participatory practices and their political agency. Looking back at theories of participatory artistic practices from the conversational to the antagonistic, I probed what has changed in the understanding of this scale during the last decade, whether and how this was affected by political changes, and if a new sensitivity could be found in recent participatory practices which is neither nihilistic and provocative nor consensual and moralistic—an unsafe safety of sorts, both antagonistic and caring. Participation was examined in juxtaposition with other forms of togetherness such as collaboration, collectivisation and commoning, but differentiated from them. In parallel I looked at developments and tendencies in the discourse around the curatorial and searched for what participatory curating might entail.

As I attempted to define participatory curating, I looked at various turns that signified changes in perceptions of curating. From the curatorial and the discursive turn, where curating was no longer an act of representing objects

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research turn' and ''becoming research' to discuss how research has turned from a contextual activity to a mode of inhabiting the world; Marina Garcés in 'To Embody Critique', calling for intellectuals to get off their balconies in favour of an embodied relation to the world and to others (2006); Gayatri Spivak's 'Echo' which explores the empowering potential in echoing others as a form of creating difference (2012); Ulrike Bergermann's contradictory account of participating in protests of the Occupy movement (2016); and Sruti Bala in 'The Gestures of Participation', who reflexively acknowledges the inherent difficulty in embodied research and subjective accounts of participation (2020).

but a transfer of knowledge and relational engagement with people, to notions of embodied critique and research, and how they relate to postcolonial and feminist positions of echoing situated knowledges; I examined definitions of conflictual and political curatorial methods in comparison with theories on antagonistic participatory art.

I attempted to reverberate the blurred and slippery boundaries between care and control in participatory curating, understanding that participatory curating is not the same as merely curating participation; participatory curating would be a reflexive examination, or critique, of what it means to delegate authority as a curator, in the same way that good participatory art is a critique of participatory art.[25]

Following theories on participatory art on the scale between the dialogic and the antagonistic, and with a retrospective look at my own curatorial practice as well as other curators working with participation over the years, I searched to render a participatory curatorial practice that is political in a nuanced and relational manner: neither a consensual approach that attempts to change the world through imagined equality, nor a simplistic provocation that replicates or mirrors violence and exploitation. I borrowed several characteristics from antagonistic participatory artistic practices to devise from them my perception of participatory curating: among them are self-reflexivity, suspicion towards agency and authority and the encouragement of confusing, awkward and conflictual moments, without necessarily deeming them to be unethical.

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[25] Claire Bishop stated that the better examples of social practices often constituted a critique on participatory art, such as in the case of *Please Love Austria* which I referred to in chapter 2. Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle, Where Are We Now?', 44.

In that context I asked what the limits to the political freedom of an artist are, versus those of a curator who is expected to answer the needs of an institution, which is tied to forms of governmental and private funding. As I have stated in the introduction, this imperative is used today as a tentative warning to curators to not cross the (political) line and adhere to mainstream agendas. A curator should be careful in differentiating when a work is unethical because it hurts people of certain communities, and when it is silenced for being too political— a slippery and context-based border.

As aforesaid, I examined the relations between changes in participatory art and tendencies in curating, and the political and economic changes that began with the global crisis of 2007–8 and the protest movement that followed from 2011–2012. As I explored why these changes affected perceptions of participation, collaboration and assembly, I touched on the very definitions of a democratic society. I showed how various theoreticians describe democratic participation as occurring outside the formal institution, in the informal encounters of the democratic public sphere. In this regard, a central attribute of participation was the importance of relational speech acts, which is also central to the definition of the performative. In my rendition of performativity, the voice and the body met, and deviant repetitions became a subversive way to undermine hegemonic structures.

Thus, the human voice is an important medium in this thesis, as well as in participatory practices at large. In the various case studies, I examined the meeting points between the voice and the body, and between the individual and the collective. In these meeting points, speaking assemblies or performative gatherings were formed; they involved the sharing or the production of knowledge, via think tanks, choirs, camps, trainings and rehearsals, as formats of participation; the dualism of vocal expression (speaking, singing) and movement, that can be used to control and mark

borders as well as to undermine and infiltrate those borders, was emphasised alongside the relations between participation and refusal, and the right to silence or halt.

I probed the question of being didactic versus being ambiguous as a curator who is expected to mediate complex meaning in an accessible way. In that sense I looked at the clash between the performative voice and the written language, manifested also in the challenges of writing my own research, as it attempts to shift between theory and practice in a manner which implies a suspicion of language and its binding totality; in favour of a more embodied, intimate, subjective reflection on the relation between my own voice, as it is manifested in my curatorial practice, and others'. I exemplified how this clash is present in the artworks I exhibited and how I attempted to echo it in my curatorial practice and writing.

As aforesaid, the case studies in this thesis include artistic representations that attempt to temporarily reactivate or rearticulate myth, memory and identity, in order to enable a conflictual public sphere within the artistic realm—or in other words to turn the exhibition into a public sphere. The repetition exhibited in the works in *Preaching to the Choir*, as well as in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies* and *Voice Over*, exemplify the double movement of articulation—showing the hegemonising potential of repetition, while at the same time rearticulating a performative sphere of voices and bodies that attempt to unfix the meaning. The concept of rehearsal or training also repeats throughout the different projects, implying a never-ending process of rearticulation, whereas the exhibition as a temporal structure is in struggle with the museum or gallery as a spatial institution.

In relation to Spivak's Echo and Butler's deviant repetitions, I offered the term 'echoing with a difference' as a form of participatory curating. Spivak analysed Ovid's tale of Narcissus and Echo from a feminist postcolonial perspective,

arguing that Echo's punishment failed, and in fact turned into a reward, because her repetition was not merely imitation, and had a meaning of its own; her voice marked a difference which disclosed the truth of self-knowledge to Narcissus, since his fascination with the gaze prevented him from knowing himself.[26] Instead of adhering to being silenced, Echo found a way of producing knowledge even though she was trapped in conditions that supposedly prevented her from doing so. Connecting this back to Butler's notion of deviant repetitions, I described echoing with a difference as a form of participatory curating, as in echoing the knowledge that an artist produces, which is itself the echoing of the knowledge of a community. The difference that the curator produces is the manner in which he or she chooses to navigate, mediate and contextualise this knowledge, with reflexivity towards the schism between the curatorial voice as authority and curating as mediation. In the context of participatory curating's entailing of complex human relations, as discussed in previous chapters, echoing with a difference is also a form of preenacting the future relations that we want between one another, and between us and the world.

The clash between voice and text that is present in Spivak's Echo surfaces in many of the case studies and the artworks rendered through them. The governance of language in the works is deconstructed, amplifying the never-fixed formation of meaning and identity. In each of the case studies of practice-theory entanglements, a different emphasis is made on notions of collectivity and methods of participation; while in *Preaching to the Choir* the discussion centred around collective vocal iterations as performative testimonies, in *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)communal* bodies the body and its

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[26] Spivak, 'Echo', 220–226.

choreography come into the fore. Choreography as a form of ordering of the subject, as well as a potential tool of dissent, corresponds with the dual potential of the voice to control and to undermine said control. *The Infiltrators* and *Voice Over* meet around questions of borders, definitions of identity, and the question of who is speaking for whom. All projects cast a reflexive, critical gaze on the agency of artists in participatory practices and on notions of homogenic collectives and essentialist identities or communities.

While I wrote about my own practices and others', I found that there were many conflictual dualities—not just between the voice and the gaze, or between the voice and the body's ability to control and to undermine it, but between harmony and dissonance, collectivity and difference, participation and refusal; between encouraging empowerment and agency and accentuating conflicts; between preenacting a more democratic future and mirroring dystopia as a wakeup call.

To conclude this conclusion, I would like to go back to one of the main questions of this thesis, which became even more relevant and heated in recent years: whether art at large, and more specifically participatory art and curating, could be a response to threats to freedom of speech and freedom of movement, and to silencing of voices that don't adhere to prevailing myths and hegemonic agendas; whether it could impact and undermine perceptions of identity and community that call for a homogeneous totality and exclude others violently. After delving into these questions and manifesting both the potential power as well as the challenges of participation, I still don't have all the answers, but I'm more confident about the set of tools that could be used, and that I will continue to use, in the process of trying. However, as the thesis fluctuates between layered positions and calls for situated and embodied knowledge, it is important to mark that as the world is more immersed in fake news, fascist regimes market themselves better than an advertisement agency and at the same time protests and demonstrations become extremely creative,

it will be more and more difficult to discern which narrative is true and which is false. Thus, the struggle between the dual potentialities of the voice and the body—to be governed and controlled as well as to subvert and undermine forms of governing—will most likely continue to take central stage in the future.

Within this contradictory realm, this thesis implores whether and how participatory practices can offer layered concepts of community and thus undermine nationalistic and racist forms of governance. In a time when the discourse around participation, collaboration and commoning seems to have been exhausted, it searches for fractures that allow an escape from dichotomies; it aims to locate the expanding definitions and porous borders of what encompasses political/performative/participatory art and explore whether and how the recent political events, and the voices they convey, are audible beyond the immediate remit of their reach.

What curators could do, as they echo the echoes of the artists through formats of exhibitions, assemblies, performances or essays, is to continue to repeat and rearticulate what they mean, attempting to find a rhythm, moments of 'song', of a shift from a representational sphere to an embodied one, constantly working through their own curatorial identity, without ever fixing the meaning, without forgetting that while no truth is absolute, there are still truths for each one of us; we should constantly question them, but at the same time not forget them. In that sense, writing this thesis is by itself conflicted as it attempts to produce meaning from processes of embodiment that escape signification, to chase political developments that change rapidly in a world in chaos, and to resonate a curatorial identity that has changed significantly in seven years. With this body of work, as personal and chaotic as it may be, I aim to make accessible and further disseminate the understanding of these practices beyond the experience of those who participated in them, with hope that it might be useful to others.

Curators: ruangrupa

Fig 67. The entrance to the Fridericianum at documenta fifteen, Kassel, September 2022. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 68. OnCurating's *Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education summer school* at the Fridskul Common Library by Gudskul, documenta fifteen, Kassel, September 2022. Photo: Maayan Sheleff
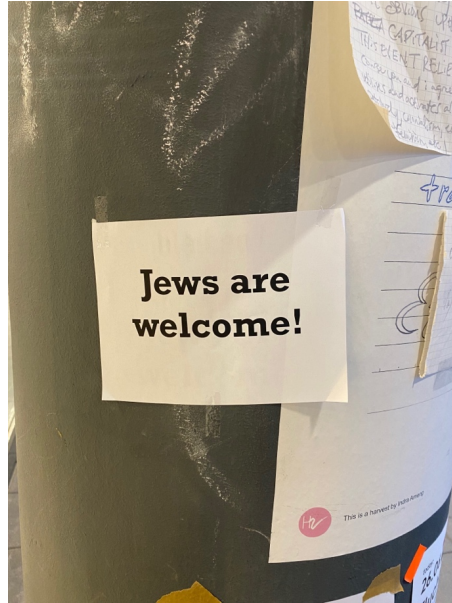
Fig 69. Note at the entrance to Ruruhaus, documenta fifteen, Kassel,
September 2022. Photo- Maayan Sheleff

Fig 70. Kerri, Hanna and Maayan Listening to Black Quantum Futurism,
documenta fifteen, Kassel, September 2022. Photo- Tanya Abraham

Conversation between Florian Malzacher, Jonas Staal and Maayan Sheleff[27]

Before: a conversation between Florian Malzacher and Maayan Sheleff in a cafe in South Tel Aviv, April 2019

M: Can you tell me about *Training to the Future[28]*? What are you planning? What do you mean by training?

F: *Training for the Future* starts from the simple observation that most of us have difficulties to imagine a future which is worth living for. Not only do we not expect much positivity from the future, we often also don't have our own visions of it, desires or goals that are not only reactive. At the same time we can see that it is desperately necessary to be active in shaping this future. So the idea

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[27] This conversation was published in *(Un)Commoning Voices & (Non)Communal Bodies,* Maayan Sheleff and Sarah Spies, eds. (Zurich: OnCurating.org, 2021).

[28] The project was held in September 2019 in the frame of Ruhr Triennale, described by the curators as "a utopian training camp where audiences become trainees in creating alternative futures...It seems a consensus today, that what is ahead of us can only be imagined as a disaster. Training for the Future instead aims to collectively reclaim the means of production of the future".

https://www.ruhrtriennale.de/en/agenda/130/JONAS_STAAL_FLORIAN_MALZACHER/Training_for_the_Future/

of the training is that you can learn something that helps you to be prepared for the future - but also to claim part in influencing or at least imagining it.

The term "training" also hints at a more physical or practical approach then a seminar and most workshops - so the presence of our bodies will play a role in this - the groups in which the training will happen will be quite large - and the time together rather tight. In this regard the training will be a proposal, an offer to start something that you might want to continue later on. But you also might disagree with some of the approaches of course - since the trainings are quite diverse and might even be contradictory in their visions.

M: What is the difference between the training here and the 'Marathon' in one of your previous projects, *Truth Is Concrete* (2012),[29] which was also an intensive form of participatory knowledge transfer?

F: *Truth is Concrete* happened almost seven years ago - and a lot has happened since then. When we organized the 7-day marathon in 2012 it was still a time of optimism about the social movements all around the world - and at the same time, it was not pure enthusiasm anymore. When we started working on it, Occupy Wall Street was not even thought of yet. And when it happened OWS had already been evicted. So it was a time where there was a huge desire for exchange and sharing experiences and practices. It seems to me the tone has changed since then, there are much more confrontations also between different groups, there is - sometimes rightfully so - a focus on

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[29] *Truth is Concrete, Political Practices in Art and Artistic Practices in Politics*, curators Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza, 2012, in the frame of Steirischer Herbst Festival, Graz, Austria. Truth is Concrete was 24/7 marathon camp, with around 300 lectures, panels, tactic talks, performances, concerts, films, workshops and a parallel, self-curated, spontaneous Open Marathon.

differences. I don't think the openness, enthusiasm and generosity towards each other that marked *Truth is Concrete* would be possible today - for many reasons.

M: I think that this is an important issue as it connects to concepts of agonistic pluralism, and how the changing reality sheds a different light on them. Think for example of Claire Bishop's famous claim that the best participatory projects cause the participant to feel confusion and discomfort and often involve conflict or even provocation.[30] Today, with the fake news and the right wing's advanced propaganda, things are at times so absurd and extreme that it becomes impossible to draw the difference between reality and satire. On the other hand, as you mentioned, subtleties disappear also on the side of the activists- maybe as a counter reaction. Would projects like *Please Love Austria* by Christoph

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[30] Claire Bishop, 'Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?', in Living as Form, Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011, ed. Nato Thompson (New York: Creative Time Books and Cambridge, Massachusetts and London, England: MIT Press, 2012), 34–45.

Schlingensief[31] or the "Yes Man"'s tactical media[32] be as effective today as they were a decade ago?

F: No, many of these approaches wouldn't work today anymore - which is not very unusual, because they are very context and time specific. So there are other activist and/or artistic strategies developed today. Think for example of Jonas Staal's "New Unions"[33] which is based on the assumption that we need

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[31] "This project, which resembles the like Big Brother reality show, was attended by 12 asylum-seekers, that have lived one week in a shipping container nearby the theatre in central Vienna. Every day, through a vote by phone or internet the Austrian people chose the two least popular people that were ejected and then deported to their native country.

The project was carried out during a period a tense discussions in Austria around immigration and nationalism with Jorg Haider's nationalist Austria People's Freedom Party enjoying strong support."

https://museumarteutil.net/projects/please-love-austria/

[32] https://theyesmen.org/

[33] "New Unions is an artistic and political campaign that departs from the current political, economic, humanitarian, and environmental crisis of Europe with the aim of assembling representatives of transdemocratic movements and organizations to propose scenarios for new future unions. New Unions considers the crisis of Europe simultaneously as a crisis of the imagination, and as such rejects both ultranationalist parties that demand separation from the European Union and seek to return to a mythical notion of the nation-state, as well as the political-economical functionary elite that has used the EU for its austerity politics. Instead, New Unions argues for the need for third, fourth, fifth options in the form of alternative scenarios for transnational unionization."

to build new alliances, that we have to find common ground - but at the same time there is a demand to first change the underlying structures and conditions before it is possible to unionize. But while these seem to be contradictory aims - to unionize vs. to focus on divisions and differences - we should not forget that they may happen in different time frames. There is usually only a small window of time for movements like #Metoo or Black Lives Matter - it is a matter of "now or never". So the strategy is to push as hard as possible since all the demands were ignored for so many years and nothing has changed. But at the same time it is necessary to not forget the other timeline, in which it is just as urgent to create unions in order to change the path of this planet towards the manifold catastrophes that become more and more tangible.

M: When you and Jonas are imagining the future you will be training for, would you say that it is more useful, as an activist strategy, to imagine utopia or dystopia?

F: For me *Training for the Future* is about developing utopias - or maybe it would be more prosaic to call them pragmatic utopias. There are already so many science fictions that imagine dystopian worlds… So the interesting thing is: are the utopias we are imagining common utopias - or divided and divisive ones? I have the hope that artistic strategies help to open some pathways within the current landscape of confrontations. We need safe spaces and agonistic spaces at the same time. So what is the relationship between the two? Again there is not necessarily a contradiction, perhaps they just need to be considered as different moments in time.

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http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/new-unions-1/

M: Maybe you need to feel relatively safe within an agonistic space, if that's possible.

F: Yes, because being in a safe space might change your personal situations but not your social and political situation. You need to enter the agonistic space in order to fight for your hegemonic project. And you need to create radical safe spaces - because mediocre safe spaces just produce consensus politics.

M: Another thing that I often ask myself is if we ever reach larger audiences outside the communities of artists and activists and does it even matter? Because these projects attract a certain kind of crowd.

F: I'm all in favour of projects that are able to reach larger audiences - but right now it seems that first one needs to communicate in smaller circles of artists and activists to figure things out. And after all: These people are multipliers. At TFTF all trainers and trainees work in different contexts and can carry things further, in many different directions. Also I believe that the idea of the training is bringing something to the artworld which is not very present there. So there is a necessity to focus on the art world in order to show that art can create these different kinds of space.

M: In this project do you see your role as a curator, as an artist or as a dramaturg? And do you see an echoing between the kind of artists you are interested in and your curatorial or collaborative methodology?

F: I never see myself as an artist. I think it is productive to play with the roles we play, and the roles of artists and curators complement each other in a very productive way. A curator has to do things (and can do things) that within the role of an artist are more problematic or not desirable. And on the other hand, in the role of a curator I sometimes have the freedom to do things the role of the artist would not suggest. But also I guess, at some point in my life, I decided not to take on the role of an artist because I encountered some artists whose

visions and practices were much more radical or much more consequent than mine. For me this is one of the most important aspects of the role of "a good artist". And it is this consequence of a few artists and a few activists that I am drawn to and that I try to connect and contextualize in my own way.

With *Truth is Concrete* the aim was to bring a lot of people - artists, activists, theorists, audience - together and create a context, a platform, a curatorial concept that would enable something that might otherwise not happen. So from the beginning it was about pushing the limits of the curatorial role beyond being merely a host - and at the same time serve a bigger political and artistic purpose. So in this regard I would say *Truth is Concrete* was a curatorial proposal while *Training for the Future* is much more driven by the artistic approach of Jonas. For me that means that certain decisions I would clearly leave to Jonas. I might discuss them or try to influence them - but at the end they are artistic rather than curatorial decision. But this is an undefined field - and that's productive. And of course, every collaboration differs. In another project I am currently working on - a performance by the Cuban artist and activist Tania Bruguera - it is a completely different kind of collaboration.

Either way these kinds of collaborations are different from other curatorial work. I like the idea that curating does not necessarily mean endorsing. So in other projects it is also possible to have a more critical or agonistic relationship with the artist you work with. Struggling with each other can also be a form of collaboration.

M: I want to go back to what you said about the curator as a host. Do you feel that as a curator- host you sometimes go between two positions: one is to make your guests comfortable and the other one is to push them outside of their comfort zones in order to get something interesting out of them?

F: Of course, but in any case you have to consider what will be the best outcome. It's about creating the best setting for something, may it be a friendly or an unfriendly situation. But, again, in the role of a curator I would not overstep certain lines in dealing with an audience which the artists I work with might. Maybe I am too cowardly, but I would like to see it not being my role. For example, when Jonas, Joanna Warsza and I created Artists' Organisation International[34] it became quite a confrontational event. As a curator I would usually be more transparent, explain the rules of the game beforehand.

With the 'Trainings' I would say they are a rigid proposal but there is no hidden agenda, while artists like Renzo Martens or Artur Zmijewski are working with what Pablo Helguera called involuntary participation——[35]which basically means that they don't lie but also don't necessarily tell the truth. They deceive their participants a bit and this is something I won't do in my practice as a curator. I might invite artists to do it for me though.

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[34] 'Artist Organisations International brings together over twenty representatives of organisations founded by artists whose work confronts today's crises in politics, economy, education, immigration and ecology. Artist Organisations International explores a current shift from artists working in the form of temporary projects to building long-term organisational structures. What specific artistic value and political potential do such organisations have? How do they perform? What could be their concrete impact on various social-political agendas and possible internationalist collaborations?'

http://artistorganisationsinternational.org/

[35] Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art: A Materials and Techniques Handbook,* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books Inc., 2011).

After: a zoom conversation with Jonas Staal, Florian Malzacher and Maayan Sheleff, April 2020

M: Originally, when I invited you to have this conversation, I was planning to ask you about your post-event thoughts (on *Training to the Future*) - what you had planned and what eventually happened. Now, it seems also relevant to ask if and how you would have imagined the future differently if you did this project now, in the midst of the pandemic, and would 'assembly' even be possible?

F: I was wondering about how to demonstrate when you have to keep distance. There is the example of the recent Tel Aviv demonstrations. I really liked the picture from above with everybody keeping a 2 meter distance[36]. Then there are also other examples from Germany and Poland, where kiosks or takeaway restaurants were allowed to be opened and demonstrations weren't allowed. So people instrumentalized the cues (with a distance of 1,5 meters between each person) in front of some takeaway cafés for their demonstration. That happened with a pro asylum demonstration in Berlin and against abortion laws in Poland. I was also thinking of the famous "Standing Man" performance by Erdem Gündüz in Istanbul, which is also about a demonstration that is not happening anymore. So in a way, there are choreographies and formats for absent demonstrations, assemblies that remind us that we cannot assemble. If we had scheduled the training one year later, could we have adapted the training in a meaningful way to the current situation or would we just cancel?

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[36] see for example here:

https://www.palestinechronicle.com/israel-thousands-protest-against-netanyahu-amid-coronavirus/

J: I don't see any scenario in which we would have canceled, even if we would not have been able to physically gather. I think the notion or the format of the training, could have had many different forms in terms of instructions, collecting different methodologies, including alternative organizational forms that are emerging from the coronavirus crisis.

In some sense maybe the question is not even that different, because before the coronavirus crisis we were asking how can we organize to challenge the means of production of the future and now we would ask exactly the same question. In a way what we are inheriting now is the consequence of our lack of organization before.

What I have been observing in this crisis, is how much it confronts us with choices of the recent past. Like in Greece, where I am at the moment, a new right-wing government was elected. They are hiring IC (intensive care) beds from private hospitals - for tens of thousands of euros per bed. If we would have voted the Syriza government back into power, that would never have happened, they would instantly have nationalized the private health care infrastructures, at least for the period of the pandemic, as it happened in the context of the Podemos-led government in Spain. So on one hand there is the question of how do we train and organize an assembly in the context of the pandemic, on the other hand the pandemic is kind of mirroring all of the made or lost choices of the recent past. What we could have organized and what we did not now gets amplified in the present.

M: It's as if the subconscious is now surfacing and everything becomes more extreme. I've just read that Trump is banning all immigration starting from today. He also of course already gave benefits to oil companies. And in Israel Netanyahu is basically taking the country hostage in order to prevent himself

from going on trial. So it is kind of like an enhanced mirror of what was already happening.

J: Enhanced, yeah, that's the word.

F: To come back to the training: so if we can't come together physically what can be transferred to an online space - and what can't?

J: If we wouldn't have been able to physically gather, my first thought would be to ask each of the trainers to set up instructions for the trainees to be sent. But not to try to hold on to the existing format, and hold it in the form of a big Zoom meeting with 450 people as if we can somehow continue the situation as it was before. I think then it would be more about instructions of how to gather within the direct and existing surrounding, to acknowledge and build on the way the pandemic has site and culture specific impact.

I am thinking about that a lot now because apart from the different campaigns that I am involved in directly related to the pandemic, there are also projects in the near future where some forms of assembly were planned and probably in some form or way could happen. But am I now willing to conceptualize parliaments where people have a 1.5 meter distance? And how does that relate to the core idea of the assembly? I somehow feel very resistant to the idea of facilitating this atomization process that is manifesting now and I also feel that we are inheriting a capitalist crisis, which has created the conditions for this virus to emerge and circulate at a rapid pace. The total precarization that is going to manifest as a result of our added dependency on telecommunications is one big exercise for companies to figure out: oh actually we don't need that office space, or actually our teachers work much harder when we put them online, this all feels like the amplification of dynamics that should be rejected in their entirety.

So I feel resistant to facilitating the choreography that naturalizes the crisis, that naturalizes the pandemic. We need to get to the origins of how this crisis manifested in the first place and why and identify who is benefiting from it. Who was already benefiting before and is trying to establish hegemony even further in this new era of Coronavirus capitalism.

F: I don't know, I sometimes feel that this discussion is just adapting to a discourse that was already there. So the virus has to fit into a certain logic of critiquing capitalism. And partially it's obviously true: Capitalism didn't go down and the ones that always profit also profit from the virus. But on the other hand other things are happening as well- things that we did not expect, like the oil price going below zero. Of course it's very important to be aware of who's gaining from it, and not to romanticize rather anecdotal events - but how could we not just naturalize it?

For me there is a performativity in these kinds of assemblies we were talking of that emphasizes a lack. We cannot give up on the idea of getting close. We have to be aware of the phantom pain of all the onlineliness. I actually like the idea of producing assemblies that cannot be assemblies just in order to produce exactly this desire. Like Erdem Gündüz on Taksim Square was showing that something is missing: a man standing alone where there used to be a demonstration. It was not about replacing the demonstration; it was about showing that the demonstration could not happen anymore.

And maybe we just should not give in, we should not just overproduce and pretend we are happy with this situation, but rather ask how can we produce a desire to come together again? And keep this desire alive, so that we don't get used to it. And at the same time acknowledge the need to stay at a distance. We should make the tension visible - and not release it by going in either direction. As you said when you launched your project "Collectivize

Facebook"[37]: This is not a substitute, it's a pragmatic solution for the moment. So how can we make this physically felt, this desire and political necessity of assembling. And at the same time acknowledge the necessity not to be able to do that at the moment.

M: For me it raises a lot of interesting questions about participation because I think that even before, online participation was often about being visible. There was always this race- which of course is also connected to neoliberalism- to be visible and produce more content. And now there is this acceleration of the need to be visible, you have to constantly produce attractive online content and invent new platforms, which, of course, you can't, because you have to take care of a two-year-old child or you'll be fired or you're hungry. So in a way I think participation online is always infected, sorry about the irony, with this sort of neoliberal purpose. With online participation engagement is always mediated by various agendas, and if we are in a sort of crisis, the temporal virality constantly intensifies the crisis, like an echo. And somehow when you're together in the physical space you create a different kind of temporality, less infected by all this propaganda. You feel your body and the closeness of other bodies in a tangible way, and then the participatory engagement is completely different.

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[37] 'With over two billion users today, Facebook impacts our social, economic and political lives in an unprecedented way. In response, artist Jonas Staal and lawyer Jan Fermon initiated a collective action lawsuit to force legal recognition of Facebook as a public domain that should be under ownership and control of its users.'

http://www.jonasstaal.nl/projects/collectivize-facebook/

J: That's absolutely true, but at the same time I remember that the way the training camp came about was also as a critique of the very form of the assembly. The idea was to move from assembly to training because of the difficulty of the assembly slowly becoming a kind of substitute for political action: as long as we are together, as long as there are bodies in a room discussing something, it feels we are doing "something." And after the assembly there is another assembly and another assembly and it can risk becoming a self-serving paradigm. What would it mean to shift towards the training, to somehow embrace an aspect of disciplining, not disciplining as a punishing act, but as a way of expanding our capacity of collective action? For me, this question still holds very much in this particular moment.

It's obvious that together with the pandemic there is also a different virus spreading, I call it the "red virus." There are more reawakened socialists in the world than ever before because suddenly everyone wants universal basic healthcare, basic income, well paid care-workers and cleaners and the like, this is a huge base and potentiality that could turn this moment into a transformative one. But that won't go without a fight and it still needs incredible discipline. We need a militant imaginary of where we want to get to. What is the kind of world we want to build through this crisis, how does it make visible what is wrong, what it is that we want to achieve? But we also need structural trained constituents that can enforce these futurities to become reality, because it's very clear that our opponents, whether it's the authoritarians or neoliberals, or the combination of the two, have had their plans to exploit crises ready for a long time. Erdoğan knew exactly what he wanted to do, the right-wing Greek government knew exactly what they wanted to do, when it comes to mass precarization or corporate benefit, or when it comes to dismantling independent democratic institutions. I think we were working on the idea of the training camp to have our own plans and trained constituents ready for such moments as

well. So if there is any form in which we would continue this now, I think we would have to acknowledge the changed choreographies of our intimacies, of our gathering, but at the same time it would have to focus directly on how to spread this red virus, how to enforce this reawakened social imaginary?

F: I agree, the training now would have a much clearer focus. We offered a very wide array of futures and approaches, and now they would have to be narrowed down. The task would be clearer. I really like the idea that the trainers give manuals or tasks or structures and then you work with these in different places. Because we already had the discussion about the possible eurocentrism of the last edition and about its context specificity and the problems that might come with that. There was, for example, a discussion around the training given by Heath Bunting, who recommended touching the police as a strategy to confuse them. And some people said: well, if you do this where I come from, you'd just get beaten up. So this strategy is obviously not universal. So by this the training would become even more specific. They would have to acknowledge what you can actually do, in what kind of lockdown you might be trapped, what the specific social situation is in the concrete space you are in. This would actually be a gain; to understand what tools, strategies, weapons actually can function in which concrete context.

M: One example of a local specific context in terms of surveillance could be how the medical masks were used by protesters in Hong Kong to confuse the facial recognition in cameras. Now that the masks are obligatory in many places, maybe they could be used in other subversive ways? Or remember the propaganda and graffiti robots by the *Institute for Applied Autonomy*? They designed robots that deliver propaganda and draw graffiti so that you can't find and arrest their human sender. The robots protected the people who wanted to deliver their message anonymously, and now they could potentially also

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protect them from getting infected... technology can somehow be imagined in different ways than just facilitating zoom conversations.

But I also wanted to go back to the concept of training because the specificity of contexts brings up some issues regarding why a certain person is a trainer and another a trainee- why should this person delegate their knowledge to other people and shouldn't the knowledge be transferred in a less hierarchical way?

J: For me, using the terms trainer and trainee is not necessarily an imposition of hierarchy, as trainees can easily become trainers and vice versa. What we chose was to highlight competencies related to questions of reclaiming the means of production of the future from people who have been invested in these questions for several decades, when it comes to protest, choreography or hacking for example. But acknowledging competence is not a denial of the fact that there are also other competences. A different starting question would have resulted in a different division of who can be temporarily regarded as a trainer and who can be temporarily regarded as a trainee. On top of that if a trainer does their work well, a competence is transferred and at the end of the training, a trainee becomes a potential trainer. So for me what seems to be hierarchy is more about a temporal recognition of competence related to a specific question and an undoing of the division of knowledge through the training, because essentially that knowledge is redistributed and you end up with more trainers than trainees.

Returning to your previous comment, the question of surveillance is crucial, for example in relation to all of the different apps that are being developed to speed up the "re-opening" of economies for the coming year. Apps through which people will continuously be receiving messages whether they have or have not been in close contact with someone that might be carrying the virus and are imposed to stay at home in quarantine for another period of time, or might be

rejected entry for use of public transport systems or going to public spaces, in one form or another. There are a lot of technological tools of surveillance that had difficulty to get into the public market because of resistance against privacy infringement, and now have a perfect occasion to be fully put to the test because when there is a sense of collective emergency people are obviously much more willing to give up what previously seemed to be extremely important civil liberties. Just out of a sheer desire of getting out of the crisis as soon as possible. And this is what makes it hugely difficult to engage crisis as transformative moments, because it is exactly in crisis that people desire to return to an idea of the "normal." Even if you hated that normality it seems better than being at home jobless or not even having a home, or being evicted from your house in the middle of a crisis because you can't pay your mortgage. This explains for example why in a country like the US, where it would be most rational to vote for Bernie Sanders in a moment like this, the desire for Biden becomes even bigger. Because it is the person that represents this idea of a pre-post truth normality. So that also puts a challenge on how to engage a crisis transformatively; it is even more difficult to mobilize people now for a promise that everything will change, because everything has already changed and that is what makes people so fundamentally and understandably anxious.

F: Just a remark with regards to surveillance and tracking technologies: One of the classic divisions amongst the trainers and the trainees in the last edition of TFTF was of course mirroring the division within the left between those believing in technology as a means of change and those being very sceptical towards or even against technological advancement. And this is also an interesting thing to revisit at the moment; how much do we believe technology can be part of a progressive change and where is it a mere threat, a danger? Again this seems to be a question to which the answers are constantly shifting

- especially in a time where tracking apps might to a degree be something that can help us move more freely again.

J: Here is again the enhancement of already existing policies and infrastructures. For me when the pandemic started, I wanted to cancel most of the running projects in order to think through what is happening now and not to stick to business as usual and facilitate even more precarious economies that are emerging from this crisis. The lawsuit that lawyer Jan Fermon and I mounted against Facebook was the only one that we stuck to though, even though there was this huge sense of absence not to be able to launch it with 400 people at HAU Theater in Berlin as planned, and miss all the antagonisms and intimacies that are part of bringing an idea into the public domain and trying to mobilize for its support. But at the same time it felt, at least for me, like a campaign that fitted the moment because everyone has worked for Facebook and no one was paid for it. You have a stake, they owe you, so we should own them. We are in a crisis, we need income, and we are even more dependent on social media for which we labor as unpaid data workers. So somehow it felt like a strategy in which you can use this desire to return to normality: Yes we will maintain the Facebook platform, you will remain a member, but with an added value, that you will be co-owner, that you will finally be paid for the work that you have done. So I am very much thinking of how to strategically anticipate the desire to return to normality, and how to turn that normality into an alternative future. Yes, we will keep all of these infrastructures that we are so used to and that create our sense of daily life, but the change will be a change of ownership, a change of purpose, a change of who benefits. I feel that this is the moment when we have to struggle over the infrastructures that we have, but under a fundamentally new paradigm.

F: But from what you say it becomes very clear that we actually need training now, because the state of emergency becomes a state of permanence. It is already becoming more or less clear that it will be like this for at least this year, maybe next year, maybe forever, and infrastructures will be built. Yes, these infrastructures will provide a few more intensive care beds, but they will also entail a lot of other stuff that we will not be so happy about. So wouldn't that be the moment to actually launch a training- which might be digital, might be instructions, might be assemblies in 50 different places organized with only 10 people at each place - all kinds of forms? And to have a clear focus on what we need to prepare, to train for right now - for the immediate future - and the future after that?

I think the good thing about the training is that it's a form of disciplining yourself to act, but at the same time, because of their diversity and their different approaches, they also offer food for thought including the format itself. A training is a proposition that you have to follow in a certain moment and only then you can criticize it. So it actually is a vulnerable proposition - but one that you have to acknowledge with your whole body.

J: I agree that the training is a form of reflection through an embodied experience. And the question is if reflection makes sense, or has any purpose, without an embodied experience in the first place. There is the question of how we politicize the virus as something that shows a violence in an existing system but opens up the possibility of transformation at the same time. I would say it would be a kind of training for collectivization, it would need to be something that is much more focused, as you said Florian, on this particular moment, and on the very slim window of opportunity that it provides but with a huge renewed politicized constituency that is unwillingly more socialist than it has ever been before. It even counts for many neoliberal governments that have been forced

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to put in place certain measures that they would otherwise have condemned as the worst cultural Marxists propositions.

I am wondering if collectivization is not another form of assembly, if it's a form of assembly through infrastructure. Similar to the way that I can see social distancing as something that simultaneously represents a social closeness, socially distancing because I want to care for another body, for another human, for a community. We can also see this distancing as a way of being closer to one another or enabling the possibility of closeness from a collective mindset, a collective mindset that we might not have experienced the same way before in this extremely atomized and individualized society that we are part of. What are we talking about when we talk about collectivizations? We are talking about infrastructures that distribute agencies, agencies of health, agencies of education, agencies of economic viability, and we are much more in that mindset now than we were before. Because we have to, for as long as this virus is active, we have to continuously think of all of our actions in this sense of an interconnected infrastructure. And that can lead to even further atomization and surveillance or that could lead to another form of reclaiming our collective properties, materially, psychologically, intimately.

F: Well, fifteen, twenty years ago there was a lot of writing by online internet theorists about the great chance of collaboration, as a form of working together where you don't even need to know the other person. This was of course a favorite myth for many internet pioneers. So there is a danger in just following that route. But on the other hand there is the intimate, direct contact, the limited number of people you can interact with, that also plays a role. So how does it not just become an abstract or even esoteric concept of feeling connectivity with millions? How do we negotiate both aspects?

J: It is also related of course to the question of what is collectivization, because we have become very used to understating the term in relation to real existing socialism. But what if collectivization is neither a strengthening of the transnational corporations, nor a strengthening of the nation state? So collectivizing Facebook would not be nationalizing Facebook. Rather, it's about opening up a spectre of the transnational: collectivizing Facebook essentially means to transform it into a transnational self-governing cooperative of 2.5 billion users.

F: Why do you seem to avoid a certain vocabulary that was used in the discussion around the commons a couple of years ago?

J: It has more to do with the way that the rhetoric of the commons was so easily integrated into a lot of the neoliberal discourses or even as a way for states to abandon responsibility. Pointing towards citizens communing social security in so called "bread funds" for example, than leads to the rhetoric: "Look its great, citizens can do it themselves, that means they don't need us, that means that whatever is left of our budget we can invest in making sure that we have a tax free haven in Amsterdam south, so that we can get more corporations to register in the Netherlands". In such a scenario, the commons has less to do with common ownership, and more with the state relieving its duties to citizens.

F: It's interesting that you put an economic aspect in the foreground. Isn't there a danger that the very description of all relationships as being economized is actually - performatively, so to say - producing partly this very economization? So it's again an economic model of thinking about collectivity and commons...

J: Well, it starts from acknowledging a personal benefit: you worked for Facebook, you were never paid by Facebook, they owe you, and you should own them. But in the steps following, this process opens a possibility of new

forms of transnational social organization that go far beyond personal interest towards a collectivized form of being.

F: But isn't that a contradiction? I understand it as a pragmatic tool to grab people's attention but I am not sure it's the same thing. Because if there is a difference dealing with copyrights, surveillance and so on, there will be less money, so in a way if it's about being paid for it, there will be less payment if this other goal is achieved. I understand it from a propagandistic point of view, but I am a bit sceptical about it.

J: For me the shift from commons to collectivization is a very similar shift to the one we made from assembly to training. We are still speaking about the same thing somehow, but we are trying to add the components that include notions of discipline, confrontation, ownership, and not exactly hierarchy but acknowledgment of the fact that we live in a world where there is a fundamental division of power. A world where there are fundamental class differences, which is what this pandemic makes visible as well, and which in the micro political sense was also very visible at our training camp, when one person says, well, your training of how to deal with the police would never work in Malaysia where I would be beaten up if I would even dare to utter a word.

F: What I like about the term collectivizing is the concept of the collective and collectivity lingering behind it - for me that opens more options than only an economic point of view.

J: So are we starting a collectivizations training then?

M: While you are planning your new project, I have another aspect of the trainings for you to think about: I think that one of the interesting things that came out from the unofficial conversations during *Training for the Future*, is not only about the police brutality in local-specific context. What actually touched me the most was when some participants spoke about forms of communication

and listening, and how cultural differences and multiple identities are not being taken into account. How when somebody is given a microphone they don't necessarily feel comfortable to use it, and how some people are not comfortable with the format of the confession that the westerners are so keen on; How some people don't like to be singled out and asked to speak, while others felt that they didn't have the opportunity to be heard, because they don't feel that they can cut in when another person is talking, unless there is a long pause in the conversation. All these things, I think, are really interesting. In a way, they also come up when people are speaking online, maybe even more acutely because it is such a clumsy, awkward, alienating medium. Perhaps this is also something to think about if you're working on another training.

F: Yes, but what you described is also related to the problems of assembly: In a way the training tried to offer a different format where it's basically not about having the microphone, even the human microphone. Or rather: it is actually very clearly decided who has the microphone. So part of this critique sounds like wanting an assembly.

M: No, not necessarily, I think it was just a call to think about forms of listening and forms of speaking, that maybe there are more forms or other forms than what we think we know.

F: Yes, rightfully so, but the training was offering very rigidly a different way of interacting, listening and talking than assemblies. So it was actually a clear statement of what it would aim for and what it would not aim for. Yes, there are many other ways of doing this but the training tried to investigate one very specific direction of talking, not talking, and listening.

M: Assemblies could bring up relating comments, at least from what I remember from *Truth is Concrete*. I remember how some of the participants felt that some women didn't feel comfortable to talk, or that some of the white,

Western men were talking too much. It's interesting how even in an assembly where there is a supposed attempt to have a nonhierarchical conversation, similar issues come up. It's not that they shouldn't come up, antagonisms are of course important and these discussions are by themselves mind opening, but maybe there is more to explore there.

J: I remember from that conversation mainly one of the comments that was made, which was: we are training for the future, but our present is not the same, how can you even assume that our futures would be? And this for me relates very directly to existing disparities, economically, culturally, infrastructurally speaking - it really talks about class differences on a global scale that are amplified in a context such as this, in which every participant, every trainee has different feedback. On a personal level I feel that if we would organize the training camp again I would put much more emphasis on the care aspect, which was so well structured into the methodologies of the final two trainings by Arrivati and the Schwabinggrad Ballett, and the laboratory of insurrectionary imagination. They showed the training space as a space of care that enables an unsafe safety, safety in order to be able to be unsafe. I realized how exceptional it is to have that competence, to be able to work in that way together with your group; it means to have an embodied understanding of what collective work is. We should learn from that as organizers. What are the keys and tools we give beforehand to feel that there is something to fall back to when necessary? That is one important thing I took from this training experience. The other I already mentioned has to do with these disparaged presents and different futures- it really shows the difficulty of the fact that we were training without a social contract. You bring a lot of people together to train for a variety of futurities, but we don't have a social contract amongst each other, we are not part of the same party, we haven't subscribed to the same program; we are essentially training for the possibility of having one.

The risk of working without such a common understanding, is that discomforts and inequalities have no mechanism to be addressed structurally, and it becomes the responsibility of individuals to speak out. Whereas a meaningful organization has a social contract that enforces shared principles, whether it comes to gender equality or the insurance of equal participation. In our training camp, this was lacking, but this is simultaneously the paradox because we are trying to train for a set of different futurities in order to be able to assemble such a social contract, we can't presume it already exists. But then at the same time it shows how much it is needed, like a basis of principles that doesn't make everyone individually responsible to voice their discomfort, but in which there is a structure to assure that this discomfort is always addressed and that organizations are corrected or disciplined whenever necessary if they do not live up to these principles.

M: Or auto errored if they are always correct.

J: Auto errored- yeah.

M: but I think actually unsafe safety is really beautiful and it relates to what Florian and I spoke in our previous conversation, pre-trainings and pre-corona, about the range between over- identification, involuntary participation, and other forms of making people feel uncomfortable. I think that 'unsafe safety' is a really precise way to put it, but not so easy to achieve.

J: No, not easy at all.

Appendix 2: Fragments from a conversation between Lawrence Abu Hamdan and Maayan Sheleff[38]

M: I would like to talk about your work in relation to the exhibition *Voice Over* at the Bonnefanten Museum. The exhibition deals with the silencing of voices and how it often goes hand-in-hand with encroachments on the freedom of movement and how society marks borders. On the other hand, the voice has the ability to infiltrate these borders, which is something that you are also dealing with in your work—the agency of the voice. In my research and in the exhibition, I address the voice as manifesting the subconscious in a manner that allows for fluidity and seepage in comparison to the realm of the gaze.[39] I was wondering if you also think that the voice allows for something that the gaze doesn't.

L: I actually don't like a lot of the theoretical work about artwork that essentialises sound, that tries to say that there's something inherent to sound and listening that is different to vision. I think that there is and there isn't. I think there's a way of using a sonic imagination to access schools of thought or ways

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[38] Public zoom conversation in the frame of Visual Artists Ireland conversation series, January 12, 2020.

[39] For example, Brendan LaBelle's writings about the voice and mouth as the place of struggle between objectification and subjectivity; Freud's description of the voice as uncanny, expressing what has been repressed and then come to light as a recurrence, repetition or echo; Marshall McLuhan on the nature of the voice as a remnant of an oral history stemming from an ancient time of subconscious communal ethics, while the newer visual history of seeing relates to objectifying and discriminating.

of thinking that an image could also get you to, it's just how you choose to get there…a lot of this sort of work to essentialise sound often removes it from its dirtiness, its filthy resonance, the place in which it is active, so it's kind of lifted out of history. It's lifted out of politics, right? It sort of makes it an all encompassing theory of listening that is not about it...I'm increasingly trying to use sound to make a point and to ground it, but it's always a relation between sound and image. It's never sound by itself.

As you see in the work *This Whole Time There Were No Landmines*, that work is really trying to do a sort of synthesis between sound and image. So it's taking sound from calls across the Golan valley, the valley that's divided since 1967, occupied by Israel from Syria. The shouts you hear at work are actually the shouts from the divided families who gather on both sides of the border to shout across to each other, but the images are the moment where the border itself gets breached. There were years and years where the only thing to cross that border was in fact sound, was the voice. But there's a tension in the work, in which the voice both was the thing that could transgress the frontier, it could cross the border, but it was also the thing that was sustaining it in place. It was fixing it. It was manifesting as a kind of distance, as a divide. And when one day that border was actually breached, and one hundred and fifty Palestinians exerted physically their right to return, those same voices who'd gathered for the last thirty something years to shout across to each other, to mobilise an act of resistance—what were they shouting that day? They were shouting, stop, enough. It's going to break these land mines. And you just have this idea that there will, at some point, be an explosion of landmines, which never comes. The voice was both traversing the border and sustaining it. So like everything sound has the potential to blur or break a boundary, but also to impose new ones. But what I would say is that the voice kind of provided the first fissure in that wall, in that border, that allowed it to be breached. There's a reason why

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they go there to breach the border—it's because the voice had already made a precedent of traversing that kind of impenetrable line.

It's the same if you look at a work like *Walled Unwalled*.[40] What I'm trying to do in that work is really show the kind of continual making and unmaking of the border space. It's never that sound is this total emancipatory force that allow us to kind of cross the border, the boundary. Sound imposes new kind of limits, it bleeds through the boundaries that we would describe, the visible boundaries, be they walls or borders, but also invites practices of listening. In *Walled Unwalled* very brutal forces are using the sound to leak across and through walls intentionally to sort of extend the punitive action of a torturous act. I'm really interested in these tensions and to see the medium in its full capacity. So I'm more reluctant to make that dialectic, for me it's much more about the layered thresholds in which sound becomes image and image becomes sound. I think that that's often where a lot of the work happens.

M: You started your work as a researcher with Forensic Architecture, and many of your works use scientific methods or infiltrate into legal and juridical institutions. Would you say there is a forensic sensibility in your works, and if so, how does it manifest in terms of questions of testimony?

L: Yes, I've been a part of that project since the very beginning, so of course those methods, those ways of thinking, are incredibly foundational to the way that I produce the narratives and the claims that are made in the works. But there's something of a shift. I think it's a mistake to understand that project as a move to material evidence, as a move away from witness testimony.[41]

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[40] http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/walled-unwalled

[41] Abu Hamdan differentiates between eyewitness testimony that was archetypal as admissible evidence in court, to the forensic turn of the mid 1980s, discussed in

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Because if you look at some of Forensic Architecture's most important works, they've been very careful at thinking through testimony and understanding the tension inherent to the forensic turn. It's not cold science versus a sort of humanism. It's really about working on the thresholds of what constitutes speech in a given situation, where people are claimed to be illegitimate. What voices are inadmissible, what kinds of sounds are inadmissible? And, you know, what's very interesting about sound from the outset is that it gets you

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Keenan and Weizman, 'Mengele's Skull: from Witness to Object'. Within this forensic turn, Abu Hamdan observed a shift towards speaking and listening, rather than seeing, as testimony:

> The 1984 Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) ordered all police interview rooms to be equipped with audio recording machines, so that all interrogations from then on would be audio-recorded instead of transcribed into text. The passing of this law unintentionally catalysed the birth of a radical form of listening that would over the next twenty-eight years transform the speaking-subject in the process of law. This legislation fundamentally stretched the role of the juridical ear from simply hearing words spoken aloud to actively listening to the process of speaking, as a new form of forensic evidence… The advent of PACE is representative of an epistemic and technological shift which gave rise to new forms of testimony based on the analysis of objects rather than witness accounts. In the case of forensic listening there is no clean shift from witness account to the expert analysis of objects because the witness account and the object under investigation become the same thing. The voice is at once the means of testimony and the object of forensic analysis.

Lawrence Abu Hamdan, 'Aural Contract: Forensic Listening and the Reorganization of the Speaking Subject', 2014, 201–203.

quite fast to understanding a sort of inherent problem in the ways in which the law deduces its truths. The law continually tries to isolate things—this fingerprint here, this thing here, these incidents, that is the way that it constructs its kind of impartiality…there's something about the way in which it builds objectivity that tries to exclude forms and networks of relation between and through objects.

I can give you many examples of the way that I've encountered those forms of isolation. In the accent test of asylum seekers, it's about drawing borders and saying…Northern accent ends here, Southern accent ends here. Well, the way that sound behaves is just not like that. Right? It doesn't behave like lines on a map. It doesn't behave like a birth certificate. It behaves in an entirely relational way. And a voice is in many ways a product of everyone we've ever spoken to in our lives. It's a kind of metadata, it's a network. It's not really a kind of originary force, a kind of a being of my identity. It's simply a collection of small phrases and fragments that I've sort of acquired. Right now I'm talking differently to how I would talk when I reach my destination in the car and I speak to someone else.

Sound as a medium is so distinct from the ways in which law solicits its evidence. Sound very quickly points to a kind of fundamental problem with the law and through that its inability to address structural problems, because it's continually individuating issues. It's continually isolating them, it's almost impossible to use the instrument of the law to produce a structural change. That's why it's very limited in terms of dealing with climate, or with police brutality. When you look at the history of sound in the law courts, what you're looking at is a series of individual cases. In each of those cases you're seeing already a kind of contest to the very foundations by which the law makes its truths…It's about looking at the ways in which the law has tried to accommodate sound, the kind of forensics that have developed around sound

and through that understand a fundamental problem in listening; to understand the way that forensics try to continually visualise sound, to bring it into a visual spectrum, never allow it to sort of see sound or hear sound for what it is and how it actually behaves.

M: But interestingly, some of your works have actually made it to the court. Is this something that you predicted, or do you feel that it's some sort of inherent contradiction, that this relational element becomes a proof of truth of some sort?

L: Well, that's because when it enters the courtroom, it's entirely devoid of its relationality. In fact, its relational quality threatens its very admissibility…there are distinct thresholds of listening within a law code. I'll give you an example. There's a lot of work done on sonic weapons, and people go: look, there's a canon that fires sound and it disperses people. My answer to that is: that's not a sonic weapon. That's just a weapon that uses sound…If you want to look at a weapon that is actually kind of sonic, that mobilises acoustic potentiality, omnidirectional in its building of ecologies of sound…there's no better place to look than the law court. The law court is a perfect sonic weapon. Another example is this obsession with not being able to shut one's ears. You mentioned McLuhan, right? He put this idea into the world and people couldn't stop thinking about it. He's the one, as far as I know, that at least made very popular this idea that you can't shut your ears.

M: Right. That the sound comes from everywhere and encompasses you and you can't control it.

L: But that's not it, because we can shut our eyes, but we can't stop seeing. If only we could, right? Sometimes we can quite easily shut our ears. Go to a law court and tell me that it's impossible for someone to shut their ears. So a lot of this sort of work needs to be done, to bring us into much more rich ways of

thinking sound, like we have developed for the image. I don't think it's a problem of sound. I think it's a problem of the sonic imagination.

I'll give another example. When I presented my work in a law court, I was talking about the accent analysis of asylum seekers. When asylum seekers come to Europe, they are subject to an accent test, which is used in the place of a birth certificate or a passport. I had at that point done a lot of research into the company that had been doing the accent test. So I was called in on behalf of a deportation hearing and an asylum tribunal to speak about the practices of those companies, to give a counteranalysis contesting the very unscientific way in which they produce that evidence and the way it enters law courts and asylum tribunals in the UK. And there's a moment where the judge asks me if I think that the whole idea of accent analysis for asylum seekers should be reformed or scrapped. And I'm kind of flattered, I think, okay, that's nice…but then the defence lawyer tells me, oh, I really didn't like that he asked you that question. And I'm like, what'd you mean? That was the best bit, right? And he goes, no, that was the worst bit, because he was essentially guiding you into the threshold of legitimate speech. If I say it should be scrapped, then everything I've said before that is nullified. Because again, coming back to this question of the way the law works, is never in this set of radical moves. It's always in these sorts of reformations, these small reforms. And so the idea that I think it should be scrapped goes against the government, against a whole set of institutions. That would make me politically motivated, so he'd be able to draw a line between the realm of politics and the realm of law, whereas for us, when we address kind of structural problems, that line doesn't exist. I mean, he is administering a deportation and yet he thinks he presides over the law and not politics. So there's a kind of perversion in that line, which he defined, that would mean not only that everything I say after that moment becomes illegitimate, but also everything I've said before. So it's not only that he shuts

his ears afterwards, it's that everything gets silenced. The whole thing gets muted.

It's interesting to see where those thresholds are within a given political agency, because that's what opens up other kinds of spaces. So you say, okay, well, if it's impossible to make these kinds of claims in a law court, we need to develop new forums or new spaces that are able to hear voices in different ways, that allow you to experiment with the conditions for listening otherwise…when you enter the law code, you see the impossibility, you see those hard lines of total muteness and silence, and you also see the myth of free speech…What I believe is not only that the accent test should be scrapped but that the border itself should be destroyed. For him, that's like total cuckoo land…

M: I'm really interested in these spaces to listen otherwise that you've mentioned. Also in what you said before about how if we close our eyes, we still see things. That makes me think about trauma. Of course many of your works which deal with testimony also touch on trauma, and trauma is usually thought of as something that's beyond representation.[42] We have these images

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[42] A severe, extreme experience, trauma used to be defined as an event outside the range of human experience. A person suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder is caught between the desire to repress the difficult memory, and moments when the experiences flood the mind and force themselves into his consciousness. A testimony is the unique transmission of a story, one which in judicial, philosophical, and epistemological Western tradition may be performed only by the person who observed with his own eyes, by a first-hand witness. However, the paradox is that due to the inability to represent trauma, a testimony can only reflect subjective truth. The attempt to represent trauma as a real event thus faces a contradiction: the post-traumatic image haunting the victim resembles a photograph of the moment of

in our minds, but we can't access them until they come onto the surface as post trauma. I think it's interesting to think about how you see your role as a

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trauma, since it did not undergo any processing in memory, which has difficulty in processing such a radical experience; it is not symbolic or metaphorical, but literal, ostensibly representing the 'historical truth' as it occurred. On the other hand, those 'mental photographs' are inaccessible since they were repressed, such that any attempt to uncover the 'truth' is bound to fail. Thus, the way in which testimony is manifested in art is not an attempt to approach those repressed images or to represent the trauma itself. The nature of art enables it to relate to testimony as a subjective truth, and to generate a metaphorical, poetic gaze which facilitates processing the trauma to a greater extent than other representation practices. Art's poetic, partial gaze enables this paradoxical space, as opposed to juridical spheres.

Based on my text for the exhibition *Prolonged Exposure* and in relation to:

Shoshana Felman, 'The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's Shoah', in Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 204–283; Cathy Caruth, 'Trauma and Experience: Introduction', in Caruth (ed.), *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore, Maryland: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1995), 1–12.

Prolonged Exposure, the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, 2011. Artists: Yael Brandt, Breaking the Silence organisation (with Miki Kratsman and Avi Mograbi), Lana Cmajcanin, Juan Manuel Echavarria, Julia Meltzer and David Thorne, Avi Mograbi, Christoph Weber, Rona Yefman and Mich'ael Zupraner. (Publication available in Hebrew and English in print). Curator: Maayan Sheleff.

Maayan Sheleff ed. *Prolonged Exposure* (Tel Aviv: the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, 2011).

secondary witness. What are the ethics of listening, or the spaces of otherly listening as you have called them, in relation to trauma?[43]

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[43] In the past, I have dealt directly with the subject of trauma and testimony in two related exhibitions, *Prolonged Exposure* and *Secondary Witness*, via participatory methodologies. The focus then was on visual tactics, image-related discourse and the problematics of the gaze. It was only with *The Infiltrators* and *Preaching to the Choir*, and later with *(Un)Commoning* and *Voice Over*, that the telling of testimony became collective and embodied, and the voice, or its loss, took centre stage. In *Prolonged Exposure* and *Secondary Witness* I was interested in the role of the artist as a secondary witness to trauma. I asked:

> If the traumatic experience is manifested only as post-trauma, then testimony is, in fact, the place where trauma takes place, and its documenter becomes an integral part of the occurrence and the event. Thus, a person who plays the part of a listener to the trauma will, to some extent, experience it himself; he will identify with the subject, and allow a blurring of boundaries to make room for testimony. In this sense, the position of the documenting artist behind the camera resonates that of a psychologist, but with a difference, since the artists in most cases does not have therapeutic intentions. What, then, is the artist's role in the exposure of trauma and testimony? What is his responsibility for the person whom he documents, which is obviously different from the therapist's?

Excerpt from my text to the exhibition *Secondary Witness* and in relation to:

Dori Laub, 'Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening', in Felman and Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 57–74.

Secondary Witness, ISCP (International Studio and Curatorial Program), New York, 2012. The winning project of ISCP's curator's award. Artists: Lana Čmajčanin, Dor

L: It's a very good question. The most recent work on reincarnated testimony is really dealing with that…I'm now working closely with a guy called Bassel Abi Chahine.[44] Bassel is the reincarnation of a child soldier who died during the Lebanese civil war. He's part of a community, as I was brought up in the Druze community, who believe in reincarnation…the question of reincarnation is interesting in relation to trauma because the theological principle is that we've all reincarnated, but you only remember your past life if it ended traumatically or violently. So trauma opens a kind of channel between lives. It's part of the transmigration of the soul…a reformatting from one body to the next…any of the details in your life are open just through the traumatic moment. And what that means is that you have this strange network of people who (might be) a family who lost someone in a kind of traumatic way. You're the return of their child or their father or whoever; you become families or networks, not in a kind of bloodline, through these fragmented traumatic incidents. Across villages, across countries, across nations, memories trans migrate and return in the bodies of others.

It's interesting because in many ways it's a process of detraumatisation. A lot of people think it's retraumatisation, but if we take the theory on the unrepresentability (of trauma)… when the soul comes to the next life, the actual demand for the credibility of the returned witness is that they can speak of the events. And in fact, in Arabic, there are many words that refer to the act of

Guez, Adela Jusic, Juan Manuel Echavarria, Avi Mograbi and Michael Zupraner. Curator: Maayan Sheleff.

Maayan Sheleff ed., *Secondary Witness*,(NY:ISCP, 2012).

44 *Once Removed*, 2019, http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/once-removed. Accessed April 2 2022.

talking or speaking, but there is one word, *Nutq* (نطق), that is the particular physical act of speaking…That's the one that they use to refer to the testimony of returned subjects. So it's a kind of reincarnation literally of speech from the dead to the living…It's interesting in relation to the question you asked on trauma and it's something I've been really thinking about recently, how reincarnation acts as a kind of medium for justice…to a trauma that has gone unaccounted.

M: Going back to the ethics of listening versus practices such as eavesdropping or surveillance, how do you consider the ethics of your work with unspoken testimonies and unheard voices? Would you situate your work as participatory?

L: I think that's a really beautiful point you make, one that I couldn't make myself, but yes, it's true that it's attending to a politics of listening. That means in a way that you're not specifically focused on a politics of representation. It's not about getting a voice, it's about where do voices go? How are they heard? Who's listening? When are they not heard? It's in a shift from the politics of speaking to the politics of listening. I think it's a move from a kind of politics of individual rights, bearing subjects, representation, to a politics of structural issues. What's at stake is an utterance rather than simply the demand to achieve a correct utterance. That for me is what listening means. It's a kind of move from figure to ground, that kind of shift. It's not really participatory, or that word does not sit comfortably with what I do, but it's very sincerely trying to find ways of listening to people…Instead of asking about these investigations' failure towards certain voices, I ask what kinds of subjects they produce? What kinds of political conditions for listening they produce, that fails those subjects in a way…

I think that if I put you in front of those interviews from Saydnaya prison,[45] the people who've experienced that horrible, awful place, it will be very difficult for you to listen to what they're saying. You will listen to them in a way in which we're kind of inherently taught to listen to that kind of subject. You will inherently produce a kind of a space of victimhood. Certain kinds of thresholds will emerge internal to your ears. That will stop you from actually hearing them and their political potential… which is not only about that awful place in Syria, but about the relation of violence to sound, the ways forms of power are exerting themselves, not only on them, but on us. Much broader things are at stake in what they're telling us, so I think it demands strategies for listening to them in relation to completely other things… rather than continually localise and individualise their claims to one place and one issue in Syria. So in a way, sometimes to hear people you have to not hear them. You have to not simply listen to their voice or be in front of them. Sometimes you have to find new strategies for hearing and allowing those voices to be heard. I don't think it's participatory, but it's certainly concerned.

I think it would make a difference if we took silence seriously, you know? The asylum seekers I spoke about before don't have a right to silence. Silence is really only allowed or afforded to people in criminal courts…the burden of proof in asylum seeker cases falls entirely on the asylum seeker. They're an applicant, they're not a criminal, which means they don't have recourse to silence, which means in case they have to give their voice, they don't have the right to say, I plead the fifth. None of the laws on freedom of expression give us the right not to speak. I think that a kind of structural change in that could

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[45] Abu Hamdan refers here to his work *Saydnaya (The Missing 19dB),* 2017. http://lawrenceabuhamdan.com/saydnaya

make a huge difference.. (so that) we return to turn away from representation to think about the ways in which our voices are heard and being listened to. I think that the law does have those mechanisms within it, but like I said, it's not within the realm of human rights, it's deeper in civil rights, in other kinds of mechanisms. I think we need an expanded human right to silence.

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Fig 41-44. Public Movement, Emergency Routine, First step training, 2019, Edith Morley Building, University of Reading, Whiteknights Campus, Reading, UK. *Photos: Susanne Clausen.*

Fig 45. Nina Wakeford (2019), an apprenticeship in queer I believe it was, 16 mm film installation and performance at Greenham Common Control Tower Museum as part *of (Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, Reading International, UK, 2019. Photo: Susanne Clausen.

Fig 46. Michal Oppenheim (2019), ChorUs: Voice Lab for Women, workshop, Saint Laurence Church as part of *(Un)Commoning Voices and (Non)Communal Bodies*, Reading International, UK, 2019. Photo: Michal Oppenheim.

Fig 47. Noam Enbar and Nir Shauloff, The Book of Challenges (2019),

Workshop, Saint Laurence Church as part of *(Un)Commoning Voices and*

(Non)Communal Bodies, Reading International, UK, 2019. Photo: Maayan

Sheleff.

Fig 48. *Truth is Concrete* (Graz, 2012)*.* Photo: Thomas Raggam

Fig 50. Reverend Billy at *Truth is Concrete* (Graz, 2012)*.* Photo: Thomas

Raggam

Fig 51. Final Assembly at *Truth is Concrete* (Graz, 2012)*.* Photo: Wolfgang

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Fig 52. Training *Beyond Welcome - Agitprop for the Future* by Arrivati (La

Toya Manly-Spain & Asuquo Udo) / Schwabinggrad Ballett (Nikola Duric & Liz

Rech). Photo: Ruben Hamelink

Fig 53. Training *Choreographies of Togetherness* by Public Movement

(Ma'ayan Choresh & Hagar Ophir). Photo: Ruben Hamelink

Fig 54. General assembly. Photo: Ruben Hamelink

Fig 55. Training *Intimacy Encryption* by Irational (Heath Bunting). Photo:

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Fig 56. Shilpa Gupta, Words Come from Ears (2018), motion flap board.

Photo: Pat Verbruggen

Fig 57. Shilpa Gupta, A Liquid, the Mouth Froze (2018), cast of open mouth in gun metal, etched brass plate, 17.5x11x18.5 cm. Photo: Pat Verbruggen

Fig 58. Shilpa Gupta, Words Come from Ears and A Liquid, the Mouth Froze (2018), Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 59. Effi and Amir, Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions (2020), mixed media, still from video

Fig 60. Effi and Amir, Places of Articulation: Five Obstructions (2020), mixed media, installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 61. Basel Abbas and Ruanne Abou Rhame, At those terrifying frontiers where the existence and disappearance of people fade into each other (2017), Single channel video, 2-channel sound, 8 min 6 sec, still from video

Fig 62. Amir Yatziv, It's Like Being Lost in a Hall of Mirrors (2020), live simulation CGI, Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 63. Katarina Zdjelar, Reading 'Europe Where Have You Displaced Love?' (2019), single-channel video, 29 min 26 sec, Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 64. Domenico Mangano & Marieke van Rooy, When the Whistle Glares (2019), single channel video, 50 min, from The Dilution Project, installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 65. Yusra Abu Kaf, Silence (2019), single channel video, 2 min 55 sec*,* still from video

Fug 66. Lawrence Abu Hamdan, This whole time there were no landmines (2017), 8 video loops on monitors with sound, Installation view in *Voice Over*, Bonnefanten Museum, Maastricht, 2020-1. Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 68. OnCurating's *Commoning Curatorial and Artistic Education summer school* at the Fridskul Common Library by Gudskul., documenta fifteen, Kassel, September 2022 Photo: Maayan Sheleff

Fig 69. Note at the entrance to Ruruhaus, documenta fifteen, Kassel, September 2022. Photo- Maayan Sheleff

Fig 70. Kerri, Hanna and Maayan Listening to Black Quantum Futurism, documenta fifteen, Kassel, September 2022. Photo- Tanya Abraham