STUDYING CURATORIAL-ABILITIES

ENVIRONMENTING, IMPROVISING, INHABITING STATES OF AFFAIRS

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I Fereshte S. Moosavi Jafari
hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own.
Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: _____

Date:

ABSTRACT

Studying Curatorial-Abilities: Environmenting, Improvising, Inhabiting States of Affairs proposes a set of abilities that has the potential to resituate curatorial thinking and expand practices of curation as creative processes. This thesis is written as part of a practice-based PhD research project and is elaborated through two parallel, and in part intertwined, studies: 1) one study focused on the philosophical and theoretical examination of practices in art, theatre and cinema that manifest potentials of the curatorial that I propose to understand as 'curatorial-abilities'; and 2) an ongoing, practice-based project entitled *Curatorial in Other Words* that seeks an alternative pedagogical, institutional and representational model of studying curatorial practice.

This PhD submission includes the following practical and theoretical elements:

1. An explorative part that contextualises an ontological triad of space, time and historical sites in relation to the potential of curatorial turns within artistic practices while problematising their conventional art historical narratives. This thesis also argues for the insufficiency of theoretical, socio-political and artistic engagements in conventional curation, and suggests the notion of 'curatorial-ability' to substitute for such deficits.

2. A research-based curatorial project—*Curatorial in Other Words*—that was initially developed as the central practice undertaken for this research. As yet ongoing, this project aims to cultivate curatorial processes in the context of self-reflexive but collaborative projects while exercising theoretical articulation of those processes. The practical activities for this project were organised in parts and over the course of two years in Tehran: an exhibition, a symposium, a series of public lectures and workshops, and also a publication.

Introducing an inquiry into the possibilities of collective operations within artistic and cultural environments, Chapter 1 proposes a 'curatorial-ability' that is manifested as 'environmenting' to generate different spaces for mutual recognition. Chapter 2 considers the performative quality of 'improvising' as another ability and discusses its relevance to curatorial practice in response to critical conditions for art in society. Reflecting on the significance of historical and socio-political contexts in contemporary practices, Chapter 3 introduces the ability of 'inhabiting states of affairs' while discussing questions associated with the power of the people.

To my friend and partner Ali Mousavi with whom I have learnt how to joint senses of respecting, caring, sharing, and working together.

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

This research explores the possible expansion of the curatorial discourse theoretically and proposes the notion of 'curatorial-ability' as a practical approach to develop and enable the potentialities of socially complex and culturally creative practices. To do so, this research proposes a number of critical abilities for both the agencies of curators and artists, as well as for both artistic and curatorial situations. The potentials of curatorial practice are analysed while critically rethinking the possibilities of the infrastructures within the art field and in relation to society. The abilities of the curatorial practice, as the title suggests, is the focus of this research and is examined through three specific phrases: 'environmenting', 'improvising', and 'inhabiting states of affairs'.

As discussed by Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski in the *Cultures of the Curatorial,* there has been a significant turn in the curatorial that has developed as an overlapping of activities, tasks and roles that formerly were distinctively attributed to different agents, institutes and disciplines.[1] This multidimensionality of the curatorial has created an 'expanded field',[2] which has allowed different capabilities and potentials to emerge. With a view to the extended debates that challenge the intensified globalisation of curating, this study seeks to reconsider the emergence of the potentials of a curatorial turn within artistic practices and the capacities of the organisational structures in the concrete contexts at which those practices take place.

This alternative approach is suggested through different 'curatorial-abilities', a notion which I develop on the basis of an understanding of Giorgio Agamben's essay "On Potentialities".[3] He challenges the traditional idea of potentiality that is 'exhausted' in 'actuality' by presenting

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[1] Bismark, B. V., Schafaff, J., Weski, T., eds, 2012, *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Leipzig: Sternberg Press.
[2] Rogoff, I., 2013, "The Expanded Field", in *The Curatorial A Philosophy of Curating*, Martinon, J.-P., ed., London, New York: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, pp. 41-48.
[3] Agamben, G., 1999, *Potentialities, Collected Essays in Philosophy*, Heller-Roazen, D., trans., ed., Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, pp. 177-184.

a potentiality that conserves itself. In that sense, the question of curatorial practice is no longer only a question of 'realising' curatorial projects. Rather, certain abilities become essential not only in relation to the 'conserved' potentialities of curatorial agency, but also to the potentialities of curatorial situations themselves. By studying 'curatorial-abilities', this study situates itself within the constantly expanding field of curatorial practices in art institutions and beyond. The positive aspects of the expansion of the field manifest in new modes of curatorial practice and reflect the collective knowledge being produced within them. The abilities that are proposed in this research are not simply the possibilities provided by institutions, but rather the abilities that interfere with existing conditions, interact with social environments and inhabit the historical-political situations through the complexities of curatorial potentialities.

The theoretical and philosophical examinations in this research are developed through a number of case studies including *Immigrant Movement International* by Tania Bruguera (initiated in 2010), *Commoning Times* by Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri (begun in 2014) and *Salaam Cinema* by Mohsen Makhmalbaf (produced in 1995) against the backdrop of the *First of Papers of Surrealism* by Marcel Duchamp (1942), *The Void* by Yves Klein (1958), the *Calling* by Allan Kaprow (1965) and *Tonight We Improvise* by Luigi Pirandello (1930), all of which offer a testing ground for the *Curatorial, in Other Words*, a curatorial initiative based in Tehran, Iran, launched in December 2015. This thesis draws on the theoretical, geographical, pedagogical and historical context of this investigative project, while the expansion of the 'curatorial-abilities' in the field is explored and documented through the practice undertaken.

The theories and knowledge integrated in these research-based practices are juxtaposed into new sets of connections and realised as 'situated knowledges' to borrow Donna Haraway's term.[4] That is, it is a form of objectivity that accounts both for the agency that produces the knowledge, the agency that learns the knowledge and the object of study itself. In this sense, the 'knowledges' that are being integrated into different aspects of the study are reconfigured through the process and in relation to each given condition. In doing

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[4] Haraway, D., 1988, *Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective*, Vol. 14, No.3, Feminist Studies, Inc., pp. 575-599.

so, this research calls attention to the curatorial practice of the situations in which the different agencies such as audience, artists and curators come together and perform assemblages of ideas, narratives, histories and lived experiences. The reconfiguration of knowledge, therefore, is to engage in the real situations and gain new meanings as a result of different sets of conditions: 'to translate knowledges among very different—and power-differentiated—communities'.[5]

Context

Attentive to the effects of the globalised role of curating and the changes this has brought about, this thesis examines curatorial potentials in a quasi-international context, via practice-based interventions, putting forward ways to reconfigure knowledges within situated curatorial processes and suggesting abilities that could be activated by both the agency of the artist as curator and the capacity of the curatorial moment. More precisely, I argue that the contemporary curatorial practices that are confined and limited to the exhibition-making are not necessary realising the best of their abilities nor do they have the most comprehensive and beneficial relation to the cultural and artistic development of their field. A set of alternative methods are needed to put curatorial thinking into a more useful and a more engaging position in the art field. The more recent curatorial studies speculate about a turn in the field that is concerned with curatorial practices that are a) non-commercial, b) more creative when independent of the institution, c) including pedagogical aspects in the projects, and d) developing the exhibition spaces within museums and galleries. In view of such shifts, this research takes a step further and presents a set of examples and methods for an updated curatorial scholarship that, respective of the above propositions, a) are self-reflexive, b) contemplate new models of creative processes, c) are educational for the artist and the curators as well as the audience, and d) consider the possibilities of mutual recognition.

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[5] Ibid, p.580.

Problems concerning the proliferation of curatorial activities, educational programmes, curatorial residencies and awards for curatorial excellence driven by various forms of displays, exhibitions and events are receiving increasing attention from scholars who have identified a need to shift the focus from the 'market-driven spectacle' to a 'self-reflexive speculation'.[6] To become more than a series of professional protocols, further debates have been put forward to reflect on the ways in which the curatorial takes place and affects the field. Some scholars, like Paul O'Neill, only see institutionally independent curatorship as a form of creative activity like artistic practices.[7] However, by reflecting on the forms of curatorship that are taking place within the institutions, I argue that creative curatorial models could activate the possibilities of the institutions. This is analysed through the case studies discussed in the research and is also explored in the ways in which the collaborations with the institutions in Tehran have shaped the practice undertaken for the project *Curatorial, in Other Words.*

In recent years, there has been a considerable increase in the discussions about the inclusion of pedagogy into art and curatorial practice,[8] although what is at stake is the type of projects designed for inclusion in museums and galleries, which in most cases only turn into economically beneficial strategies. In this regard, the placement of institutional critique is a move 'from an outside to an inside'[9] which integrates the education of the artists and curators, as well as the audience, to suggest a more equal distribution of knowledges and powers.

Expanded exhibitions are also dealing with new platforms as part of the curatorial structure, including publications, catalogues, books, magazines, websites and other platforms such as public programmes that cover a wide and diverse range of activities. The extended spaces for exhibitions or the 'reimagined museums'[10] provide larger shows and bigger spaces to display the collections for public viewing. This therefore suggests the inflation of power and

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[6] Martinon, J.-P., 2013, ibid.

[7] O'Neill, P., 2012, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, Cambridge, London: The MIP Press.

[8] For example, see: O'Neill, P. & Wilson, M., eds., 2010, *Curating and the Educational Turn*, London: Open Editions/de Appel.

[9] Sheikh, S., 2006, "Notes on Institutional Critique", available at: http://eipcp.net/transversal/0106/sheikh/en, last accessed 12 December 2017.

[10] Smith, T., 2012, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, New York: Independent Curators International.

the influence of market-oriented establishments. As an alternative, increasing the curatorial possibilities inside the existing spaces in a collaborative manner grows the projects that are organised within the collections and collectively expands the potentialities for production of knowledges.

Such fertile conditions allow one to perceive the degree of complexities in the field of curating and put an emphasis on not only the urgency of a turn within the field, but also on the potentialities that such a turn could bring about. The capacities within which curatorial practice empowers participation, creative activities and educational processes in various environments, put forward the need to reconsider its abilities and be critical of the establishment's power to theorise the methods of such a mode of practice. It is within the context of these self-reflexive speculations, in conjunction with new institutional critique, that this thesis questions the proliferation of uniformed curated events and investigates the other abilities of curatorial practice with a slightly different approach.

This questioning occurs within the study of the curatorial concerned with an area of cultural and artistic activity presented in this research that explores the process of mediation between the artist and audience or artist and institution and moves beyond the limits of representation. Here artistic activities are viewed in terms of the organisational strategies that are employed to develop ideas in a more effective and a more socially engaged capacity. The curatorial potentials are therefore viewed in practices that provide possibilities for mutual recognition, reciprocal education and shared struggles. Although curatorial practice encompasses different capacities, this research proposes some fundamental abilities and explores them in the curatorial processes suggested in creative models both artistic and curatorial, both inside and outside of institutions, as well as both local and transnational.

Curatorial, in Other Words was initiated in Tehran. Tehran was chosen as the location for this research-based pedagogical curatorial practice for a few interrelated reasons. In the first place, the Iranian Cultural Revolution at the beginning of the 1980s, which was 'in great part a war against western culture',[11] affected the condition of artistic and cultural activities due to

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[11] Keddie, N. R., 2003,2006, *Modern Iran Roots and Results of Revolution*, New Haven & London: Yale University Press, pp. 290-291.

the 'Islamisation' of the universities.[12] Under the imposed circumstances, a large number of scholars and academics were discharged from the universities, and this resulted either in migration to other countries or sabbatical from academia. Consequently, by the end of the Iran–Iraq War in 1988, private institutions, artists-run spaces and galleries became the only available hub for artists and cultural practitioners. Although the level of infrastructure within the art and cultural field was low, and limited to large cities like Tehran, the non-governmental bodies formed a more influential existence in the field.

On a more positive note, the self-organised institutions put forward initiatives parallel to the governmental bodies, but for critical platforms that could tackle self-determination for a more liberal citizenship. As described by Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemuth and Jakob Jakobsen 'In all form, self-organised is a basic and necessary social process that relies on an initial binding condition or problem, which is then addressed collectively.'[13] In particular, this research-based curatorial practice was shaped as a response to shifting conditions and to explore new possibilities for the curatorial to work within developing art-spaces, the emerging public and alternative forms of artistic and cultural activities. *Curatorial, in Other Words* was held in collaboration with Charsoo Honar, an artist-run pedagogical institution launched in 1996 by Saeed Ravanbakhsh and Dr Behrouz Najafian in Tehran, under the *Rahi Tazeh* (A New Path) programme. This programme gathered the efforts and endeavours of individual lecturers, especially after the 2009 demonstrations against the presidential election in Iran, which resulted in the forced resignation of many lecturers from universities across the country.[14]

With this in mind, *Curatorial, in Other Words* was formed to examine the structured environments for cultural productions and explore the potentials of situated curatorial processes with a focus on the context of Tehran and the challenging situation affected by global and local problematics. This project sought to problematise conventional curating and

[12] Mojab., Sh., 1991, *The State and University: The "Islamic Cultural Revolution" in the Institutions of Higher Education of Iran*, 1980-87, Ph.D., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

[13] Davies, A., Dillemuth, S., Jakobsen, J., 2013, "There Is No Alternative: The Future Is (Self-) Organised, Part 2", in "Self-Organised", Blamey, D., ed., London: Open Editions, Hordaland Art Centre, p. 34.

[14] Educational Curses in *Rahi Taze*, Charsoo Honar, available at: https://charsoohonar.com/en/education/educational-courses-in-"rahi-tazeh", and https://charsoohonar.com/en/education/educational-courses-in-"rahi-tazeh"/a-research-based-course-in-curatorial, accessed on: 6 May 2018.

rethink curatorial potentials through pedagogical and socially engaged practical undertakings. In doing so, it reflected on the abilities of the curatorial to mobilise collaborative models and collective experiences through inactivate and self-organised initiatives. Correspondingly, this ongoing practice looks into alternative 'institutional possibilities'[15] that encourage the emergence of a public who participates in different forms of sociality to practice mutual recognition and reflect on the condition that has shaped the institution. This project also facilitated an educational and discursive framework for understanding curatorial questions relevant to its contexts and built international networks and sustainable exchange with scholars in the field. By developing different platforms such as symposia, educational courses, workshops and publications, this curatorial project contributes to the expanding field of curatorial knowledge and maintains a model for mutual education.

The practice taken on for this research also developed as a self-reflexive project for myself and was proposed as a creative and dynamic model both to the Charsoo Honar institution to host the course and symposium and to the Lajevardi Foundation to hold the research-based exhibition that was developed as part of the educational course. This course and the symposium welcomed participants that included lecturers from the Europe and the Middle East, independent artists and curators and directors of some of the art-spaces in Tehran. A considerable number of lectures were held in the educational course, while speeches and panel discussions were organised at the symposium. The exhibition also presented a research-based project that was produced collectively with the participating students, and to some extent with the selected artists, that unfolded through a number of publicly presented conversations and tours with some of the artists.[16]

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[15] Sheikh, S. 2012, "Burning from the Inside – New Institutionalism Revisited", in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, Bismark, B. V., Schafaff, J., Weski, T., eds, 2012, Leipzig: Sternberg Press, p. 368.
[16] Full details are presented in the APPENDICES.

Research Questions

This thesis challenges the accustomed definitions of curating by exploring certain abilities through a multidimensional grasp of curatorial practice. By doing so, it contributes both to the theoretical studies and methodological strategies of curatorial practice by employing social theory, philosophy and cultural studies. The expansion of curatorial practice into other disciplines has lately become more visible, and this thesis further develops this field by introducing an analytical study of the potentials, mechanisms and methods through which curatorial acts take place.

The specific questions driving this research are concerned with the potentials that the curatorial develops within and between art and agencies, including that of cultural producers, systematic environments and everyday states of affairs. The ways in which certain potentials can be activated within the institutions curatorially shape the core query of this research.

- What are the abilities through which curatorial practice can help to re-read the relationship between art and the institutional environment, with a view to broader societal questions and political affairs?
- To put curatorial thinking in a new place, what type of curatorial practices can enable the reconfiguration of transnational knowledge in the local context and vice versa?

Two parallel series of examples are presented in this study to theoretically analyse and practically explore the structures of artistic and cultural productions within both local and international contexts where certain curatorial potentials can be traced. The questions are therefore set to deliver specific examples from different ranges of artistic practices alongside the specific example of the practice-based curatorial project *Curatorial, in Other Words*.

The potentialities of curatorial practice are explored in this study to go beyond the controversial discussions of the relationship between art and the condition for artistic or cultural productions that are concerned with institutional and social affairs. Certain abilities of curatorial practice are, moreover, explored more precisely to reconfigure the modes of

operation within the cultural infrastructures and revive the relationship between art and the social. The heart of the matter is not just about the exhibitions and the events that offer alternative methods to curators, but rather how certain abilities are activated to generate prolific and meaningful relationships between the agencies involved and the situated processes, creating mutual recognition between the artists, curators, audiences, institutions and the given situations.

Methodology

A complex range of methods is used in this project to think about, deal with, and explore the questions addressed above. The figure below lists the important components that formed the methodology of this research and illustrates the relationships among those components.

Theoretical Studies
Contemporary Art History
Philosophical Essays
Contemporary Art Critique
Social Theory
Visual Cultures
Institutional Critique
History of Exhibition
Alternative Cinema
Theatre of Absurd
Improvisation
Pedagogical Studies
Art and Social Change
Art and Activism
Politics of Art

Research Questions

Interviews and Exhibition Visits

Research Material
Exhibition catalogues and brochures, transcribed lectures, video lectures, conferences and seminar handouts, PhD thesis, articles

Cases for Theoretical Analysis

Cases for Historical Contextualisation

Participating in *Commoning Times* Case/ Field Work

Framing a Practice: *Curatorial in Other Words*

Designing an educational course
- Identifying the objectives
- Reading list; identifying relevant literature
- Organising seminars and lectures
- Identifying participating lecturers
- Recognising the audience/students
- Translating the literature
- Running workshops

Curating a research-based exhibition
- Writing a proposal
- Identifying the subject matter
- Holding an action research group
- Identifying the artworks
- Holding interviews
- Locating the exhibition space
- Raising funds
- Designing the space
- Writing the statements
- Designing the catalogue

Organising the *Tehran Curatorial Symposium*
- Setting up a programme
- Raising funds
- Pinpointing the time
- Inviting lecturers
- Inviting audience
- Hosting guests' lecturers
- Holding panel discussions
- Arranging site visits

Producing a publication
- Gathering all of the produced material
- Translating and editing the texts: essays, lectures, and statements...
- Transcribing the panels
- Arranging the audio-visual documents from the events
- Getting permission from the authors
- Design
- Permission from

Methodology, by Fereshte Moosavi

The core of the research questions emerged from my own previous practice as an independent artist interested in the public domain, primarily creating public artworks that were carried out using curatorial methods. I developed my career into an art director and curator of the MOP (Magic of Persia) Foundation, a charitable foundation based in London that provides various programmes for emerging Iranian artists through collaborative and curatorial projects. In doing so, I developed an understanding of the transnational systems of operation in the art establishments and their failure to take into consideration the curatorial turn. As a result, I took on a self-reflexive method throughout the process of this research and continuously reflected upon the choices I had to make for my theoretical studies and practical engagements with the field. The theoretical studies obtained and research material gathered for this research were concerned with the following: a) studies of contemporary curatorial practice and the potentialities of 'infrastructure as enabling';[17] b) contemporary thoughts that attempt to rethink the community and the social;[18] and c) the problems of global art's complex relationship to geopolitical powers. The practice that was developed out of this research also put forward a focused pedagogical study of the field and expanded to a creative model that worked through a collaborative format with independent institutions.

Joining various methodologies provided a reflective curatorial approach for this research. This is arranged by both theory and practice to incorporate my learning and the findings into creative models that can relate with and be responsive to the participants, as well as the matter at hand. This generated a kind of pattern from which the research was conducted; 'mutual recognition' was activated in three forms of recognition: that focused on the knowledge of objects, that concerned with responsibility of agency, and that which elaborates on the problem of identity or the struggle for recognition.[19] The capacity to recognise people and objects (in this instance the participants and the artworks or case studies), and the significance of self-recognition and self-identity in relation to the mutual recognition resulted from a reflexive curatorial approach.

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[17] Rogoff, I., "Infrastructure", Former West, available at:
http://www.formerwest.org/DocumentsConstellationsProspects/Contributions/Infrastructure, accessed on: 21 December 2017.
[18] For instance: Nancy, J., L., *Being Singular Plural*, 2000, Richardson, R., & O'Byrne, A., trans., Stanford: Stanford University Press.
[19] Ricoeur, P., *The Course of Recognition*, 2007, Pellauer, D., Trans, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Mutual recognition is explored here as a collective practice enabling the possibility of forms of sociality wherein people are not represented according to one-sided societal norms and values nor overlooked because of the political conditions. As proposed by theorists such as Axel Honneth, recognition is an intersubjective, dialogical and historical formation which constantly reconstruct its norms based on moral conflicts.[20] Furthermore, the probability of "nonrecognition" or "misrecognition" as discussed in Charles Taylor's *The Politics of Recognition* is addressed in the urgency of a link between recognition and identity.[21] The experience of misrecognition or one-sided recognition could violate the identity of subjects and turn into different forms of oppression. To avoid such dialectical implications, the question is how each individual can secure their independent being from the imposed power of the recogniser while keeping the possibility of collective social experiences.

The exhibitions and participatory projects are an active and integral part of social experiences within the arts and cultural fields. Curated environments, as situations created for intersubjective experiences, could encourage the participants towards a kind of experience by which they would not only recognise but also to be recognised by others. To appear together and not as an insertion in such relations—as will be discussed in some of the case studies in this thesis such as, for example, *Immigrant Movement International*—requires the kinds of practices within which the participants can overcome difficulties of cognitive or psychological interchange with one another and reaffirm their autonomous place within the community.

To identify the appropriate cases for this study, different sets of theoretical scholarship were examined. I also attended a number of conferences, conducted interviews and viewed numerous exhibitions, which was crucial in grasping a better understanding of the current situation of the field. By doing so, mapping the historical context of the development in curatorial practice became a point of departure for this research. To delineate certain potentialities of the curatorial turn, a different historical path was acquired. The examples identified for this research belong to creative and artistic fields including theatre (i.e. *Tonight*

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[20] Honneth, A., 1995, "Patterns of Intersubjective Recognition: Love, Rights, and Solidarity" in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity Press, pp. 71-91

[21] Taylor, C., 1992, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Gutman, A., (ed.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press

We Improvise, by Luigi Pirandello), cinema (i.e. *Salaam Cinema* by Mohsen Makhmalbaf) and artistic projects (i.e. *Immigrant Movement International*, by Tania Bruguera) through which it was possible to explore different potentials of the curatorial turn. This methodology made possible the identification of some original case studies, and actively participating in one of the projects as a collaborator (*Commoning Times*) provided me with a significant insight into the formation of curatorial potentials in the field and the expandability of such practice.

The theoretical background has informed the interviews and case studies and shaped the primary structure designed for the project *Curatorial, in Other Words* that are described in detail in the APPENDICES. The methods used for the pedagogical aspects, as well as the dialogical and representational portions of this research-based practice, were directly influenced by the theoretical studies and philosophical analysis developed in the thesis. Through a reciprocal process between the theoretical studies, research material, case studies and the main practice undertaken, the research questions were continuously refined and rearticulated.

The methods used for this research-based practice were mainly concerned with the research questions and the ways in which they could contribute to articulating the abilities of the curatorial. The relationship between the theories and practice strongly provided a critical reflection on the existing possibilities within the institutions in and with which this practice is formed. This relationship expanded to further collaborations that proved very effective in the given context. It is important to remember that *Curatorial, in Other Words* started with a pedagogical course, followed by an exhibition, and was continued in a symposium and ultimately will result in a publication that is in progress.

Chapter Structure

This thesis contains three chapters and seven appendices; the first chapter provides a
historical context for the research and also proposes the 'curatorial-ability' of
'environmenting', which enables alternative curatorial possibilities inside and beyond the
limits of exhibitions and within the situated processes engaged with social, artistic and
cultural environments. The second chapter provides a study of the artistic productions and
cultural producers in relation to the representation and temporality of the exhibition.
'Improvising' is discussed through a study of its performative quality in challenging the
conventional systems by confusing the border between art and life. The third chapter
presents yet another ability of the curatorial—that of 'inhabiting states of affairs' and
assessing the relationship between art and the social while reflecting on socio-political
contexts and historical sites.

The first chapter proposes and develops the research questions by illuminating their
vocabulary and contextualising, in general, their motives and theoretical focus. It then
explores historically the curated situations in which artistic and cultural productions are
created and presented beyond the exhibiting norms. As a starting point, it outlines a
selection of practices from the 1920s to 1960s, in which the exhibition operated as an artistic
form providing possibilities for curatorial moments. These examples propose a historical
context in which the curatorial methods were obtained as artistic strategies operating in the
environments that were shaped by the space of exhibition, the participating audience and
the absence of the artist and/or the artwork, such as *The First Papers of Surrealism* (1942)
and *The Void* (1958) by Yves Klein.

The next sets of examples are presented and analysed as non-exhibition practices, where
the situations were formed by the participating audience in different locations and within
public domains, while the artists were regarded as initiators, including *Immigrant Movement
International* (initiated by Tania Bruguera in 2010) and *Calling* (1965) by Allan Kaprow.

Although the former examples explore the withdrawal of the artists and artwork from the event of art to engage and to some extent recognise the audience differently, the latter practices take the event of art into the social environment and aim to produce it *with* the public.

The research questions unfold with a critique of existing practices while mapping a terrain in the Western historical context concerned with the issues of immigration and identity. To configure the possibilities for the activation of the ability of 'environmenting' in the current condition and on an international context, the attention shifts from the artwork to the exhibition (as a format), the institute (as a structure) and the city (as a commons). This gradually shapes new situations for collective appearance, as well as possibilities for a mutual recognition between all of the agencies involved, including the artist, curator and audience.

In the second chapter the analysis proposes a historical trajectory for the engagement between art and society and their contemporaneity. This is explored through the study of 'improvising' as a performative act that, from a curatorial perspective, shapes alternative places for art in society and in relation to the commons. Exploring a common that is both shared among the art practitioners and audience while retaining exclusive parts, 'improvising' is explored as a singular mode that operates in a collective manner, where on is subject to one's own act within a collective action.

In the second chapter, the concentration of the study shifts to the position of the cultural producers in relation to the format in which their work is represented. The issue of presentation and exhibition as ultimate forms of presenting artworks to an audience is examined by the questions of time and simultaneity of the artists and their work. 'Improvising' establishes the condition for a possible emergence of a different state of time that is examined as a 'curatorial-ability' that deals with urgent and unpredictable demands raised by developing processes and the participating agents. This urgency is studied by two diverse examples: Luigi Pirandello's play *Tonight We Improvise: A Drama in Three Acts* (1930) and the multi-layered project *Let It Not be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply Just Making Art* (2014), which was part of the *Commoning Times* by Ayreen Anastas and

Rene Gabri. The space of theatre and exhibition as two popular formats for the encounter of art and public are interrupted in the above examples through ongoing improvised acts that are collectively produced with audience participation. Such interruptions and instant relationships with the art are analysed with a view to their curatorial potential that could create engagement socially and institutionally while reflecting on the conditions of their making.

CHAPTER 3 expands the dimension of the analysis to socio-political arrangements and investigates their effects on artistic and cultural production via a reciprocal relationship between the two. Exploring a different potential of the curatorial, 'inhabiting states of affairs' is proposed as another ability and analysed with a focus on the Iranian context. The possibilities for the production of art, spaces for the representation of art, and situations for the distribution of art, are imbedded in an expansive context of social and political affairs that relate to different historical narrations. Such narrations are always at risk of being interrupted, neglected and/or appropriated as a result of political influences. To problematise the processes as such, 'inhabiting states of affairs' is proposed here as a form of action to resist interrupted histories. *Salaam Cinema* (Hello Cinema, 1995) written and directed by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, is examined in this chapter to deal with the questions of how people behave in groups and/or how people are shaped as collectives practicing different forms of inhabitation. With this in mind, a series of alternative approaches that emerged from a chaotic situation explore the challenges between art and society and provide possibilities for reconfiguring certain histories and their knowledges within the contemporary states of affairs.

The CONCLUSION addresses the practical implications of 'curatorial-abilities' in curatorial projects. By exploring the potentials of the curatorial in artistic practices at the encountering moment between art and society, this study proposes a new history of curatorial. This research manifests a different perspective in viewing the potentials of the curatorial as an activity within the field of art rather than a profession for dealing with the art field. Through exploring potentials of curatorial acts in diverse and inclusive sets of examples, this thesis highlights the urgency of the need to renew the theorisation of curatorship that has been limited to the agency of the curator. This practice-based research project is therefore an attempt to readdress curatorial practice by interventions in modes of representation and to critically suggest alternative frameworks.

CHAPTER 1: ENVIRONMENTING

1.1. <u>Outline</u>

This chapter suggests a trajectory of curatorial capacities within the spaces of artistic and cultural activities in the modern and contemporary domain of art. Departing from the practice of curating beyond the limits of exhibition making, I explore how potentials of curatorial techniques could engage with different forms of art in relation to social realities and could critically reflect on potentials of artistic and cultural environments. For doing so, I introduce 'environmenting' as a curatorial ability with which new situations for collective appearances could be generated within and outside of the art institutions, while potentials for mutual recognitions are activated among the involved agencies. By exploring a historical development of alternative capacities of curatorial practice, from 1920 to 2010, I aim to understand the establishment of such ability.

It is important to remember that here curatorship is not explored as an agency to represent the artworks in collaboration with artists and/or institutions. Instead, I aim to study curatorial work as a practice in which an intended absence of the 'visual presence' of an art object is replaced by a situation of collective acts. Therefore, in a number of examples, the act of withdrawal of the artist and/or artwork from the site of exhibition or the situated processes is analysed as a necessity for the ability of 'environmenting' to generate new possibilities for mutual recognition. It is not that any environment as such provides possibilities for a new agent, but precisely the transformations that are undertaken with new environments that could provide collective agencies. In this chapter I study how environments as such provide possibilities for the appearance of a new agent figure, an artist who is also an initiator, and a public who is also a creator.

Aimed at identifying the potentialities for the curatorial ground in search of the 'environmenting' ability, the first type of exhibition includes a number of instances, such as design-oriented exhibitions called the *Field of Vision/View*, which explore the extent of the observable world that is seen at any given moment. This was considered as a method of exhibition making for designers and architects. Furthermore, artists appropriated such methodologies into the field of art to work with the exhibition as an artistic form. In this regard, *An Exhibit* by Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore (1957) will be analysed in more detail.

The point often overlooked in the study of curatorial practice is the performative mediation within socially engaged and participatory practices. The ways in which the processes of co-creation could take place in such practices suggest a form of social activism for new agency of political activists that is operating in the art context. The sense in which another kind of agency that is not necessarily attached to the scheme of roles of curator, artist, audience, and so on could emerge from the curatorial moments necessitates further study of its potentialities. Therefore, through the study of specific examples discussed in this chapter, I argue how curatorial strategies could provide possibilities for mutual recognition and reconfiguration of a new kind of agency.

This is carried out through the study of two sets of practices: on the one hand the practice of exhibition making undertaken by artists as a site of creative form, and on the other hand the participatory and collaborative practices as a tool to engage in the relation between art and society. While the first set of examples explores the withdrawal of the artists and artwork from the event of art in order to engage with and to some extent recognise the audience differently, the second set of instances takes their query, that is presented as art, into the social environment and produces it with the public.

I will first outline a selection of practices from the 1920s to the 1960s in which the exhibition operates as an artistic form providing possibilities for curatorial moments. Through these examples I elaborate on a historical context at which the curatorial methods are obtained as artistic strategies. Furthermore, I explore how the new environments that were created within the spaces of exhibition revealed a different position for the participating audience in respect to the absence of the artist and/or the artwork. For instance, The *First Papers of Surrealism* by the Surrealists in 1942 and *The Void* by Yves Klein in 1958 are studied to search for the potential moments of curatorship, which because of the dominant artistic elements have remained invisible.

The next set of examples is presented and analysed as non-exhibitionary practices, in which curatorial potentials are operating within social settings and urban situations as the sites for creative and cultural practices. I explore how on such settings artists, in the role of initiators, as well as audience members, in the role of collaborators, could regard the society or the urban setting as the site of their practice to interfere with social and political realities. Henceforth, *Immigrant Movement International*, initiated by Tania Bruguera in 2010, and *Calling* produced by Allan Kaprow, are explored and analysed with respect to their 'curatorial-ability' of 'environmenting'.

1.2. <u>Conceptualisation</u>

'Environmenting' is to think of surroundings and to rethink their forces by treating them collectively. Through analysing a series of practices, I intend to claim that 'environmenting' is a 'curatorial-ability' which generates possibilities to (a) reimagine the exhibiting spaces (b) form collective operations, and (c) create networks of components that could interfere with social realities. 'environmenting' is used in this thesis in an unusual way, and the reasons for this are complex. Although environ+ment+ing is grammatically incorrect, the added suffix '-ing' embeds the spatiality of the verb 'environ' (to circle, to surround), after the noun 'environment', which denotes an action or resulting state. In other words, 'environmenting' is proposed here both as an activity and in relation to a kind of situation that is formed as a result of that activity.

It is important to realise that the complexes and dynamic nature of 'environmenting' makes the social and political condition of its activation equally important components. For this reason, the main examples that will be discussed in this chapter are selected from different periods in which the relation between artists and the society has been influenced by challenging conditions, i.e., the era of the World Wars and the post-war period, as well as the recent immigration crisis in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Consequently, I argue that art communities in those periods have experienced some crucial shifts in the art field as a result of both sociopolitical conditions and the emergence of new queries about the emancipation of art from the institutions as well as curating from the museums.

Additionally, the shift for the audience from merely a "society of spectacle" to a more engaged operation initiates on the spaces of the presentation.[22] I will contextualise the foundation of this investigation, departing from the study of exhibition making as a representational mode and an artistic form, moving to non-exhibitionary and socially engaged practices. Therefore, the historical study in this chapter begins in the early decades of the twentieth century, during which display and exhibition formats were of interest for various disciplines, including design and architecture, with a fresh understanding of the role of the audience. Then it unfolds into the mid-1940s and late 1950s whilst audience members are occupied by an examination of expression and emotion.

The focus on artist-run galleries and co-ops in the period from 1952 to 1965 in New York, where American Avant-Garde goes mainstream, indicates a different community of people who foster the art productions, exhibitions, and art events. The formation of an art community is shaped by a huge network of galleries, curators, and artists, as well as collectors, art critics, museum officials, institutions' directors, the interested public, and art students. The infrastructure and the community grow considerably larger by 1965. For instance, according to a study the number of galleries in New York changes from one hundred twenty-three in 1955 to two hundred forty-six in

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[22] This lexical combination is borrowed from the title of Guy Debord's book first published in 1967 in French and then translated to English in 1970. In *Society of the Spectacle,* Debord develops and presents the concept of the 'spectacle' in relation to Marxist critical theory and the Situationist International movement.

1965.[23] Such 'communities' appear mainly around different forms of relation between individuals and collectives, hence artists and gallerists, gallerists and collectors, curators, artists and museum directors, and others.

In this regard the question is how social interaction is made possible within a community that is dependent not only on infrastructures but also on processes of representation between the individuals and the communities. As suggested by Grant Kester, community "contains both positive and negative dimensions"[24]. On the one side, the inaccessibility of self-protective attitudes breaks down by collective identity, and therefore common experience forms a shared view. On the other side, collective identity that is often formed by an "abstract and generalising principle" limits individual differentiations.[25] Thus, to develop this further, the next question is how to maintain a mutual recognisability to sustain common.

Claire Bishop discusses participatory art as an outcome of the transformation to the neoliberal condition by which collaborative practice stands against the artist as role model who becomes his/her own brand. Having said that, Bishop focuses her arguments on participatory projects merely as art and presents such desires for social engagements as tasks taken up by artists. I shift this view slightly by expanding on the artistic quality of these gestures to a curatorial capacity. The centralised political parties of the historic avant-garde are turned to "decentred and heterogeneous"[26] social networks that could be seen not only in the artworks but in the exhibitions and the events. This transformation can be seen in examples that move the participation of the audience beyond the space of exhibitions and engage in the sociality within a considerably different format.

By the same token, in the post-war period, when private galleries and independent exhibition spaces established a considerable presence within the art world both in Europe and the United States, the audience appeared as a more crucial element for a social rebound. With this in mind, a series of practices for different possibilities of spectatorship is studied in the primary part of the chapter with the emergence of two types of exhibitions made by artists: design-based exhibitions and artwork-based exhibitions.

In the artwork-based exhibitions a different approach to the arrangement of artworks, audiences, and artists is noticeable. Through situated processes the audience becomes a part of the exhibition that is presented as an art form, even though they seem to be unaware of such involvement. The *First Papers of Surrealism* (1942), curated by Marcel Duchamp, as well as *The Void* (1958) by Yves Klein are amongst such practices that are analysed here in more detail. The

[23] Menand, L., 2017, "Thirteen Crucial Years for Art in Downtown New York, *The New Yorker*, available at https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/thirteen-crucial-years-for-art-in-downtown-new-york, accessed on: April 2017.

[24] Kester, G. H., 2004, *Conversation Pieces, Community + Communication in Modern Art,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, p. 15.

[25] Ibid, pp. 152-156.

[26] Bishop, C., 2012, *Artificial Hells, Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London, New York: Verso, p. 12.

withdrawal of the artists and artworks from the state of exhibition is an artistic strategy to create a different condition of the experience of participation of the audience.

Correspondingly, non-exhibitionary practices are traced back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, including *Calling* (1965) by Allan Kaprow, and comply with practices from 2010 and after, i.e., the *Immigrant Movement International* (2010–) by Tania Bruguera. Of course, this trajectory does not suggest a lack of participatory practices within the period between the two examples, but designates a turn of attitude in participatory and collaborative projects. The example from the earlier period represents a replacement of the participatory events from the site of galleries and museums into the domain of the public and turns them into active participants. Comparatively complexified, the later example suggests a different approach that not only withdraws the art practice from the site of exhibition to acknowledge the domain of the public as a field of creative operation but also entails the replacement of the artist with the figure of an initiator. As a result, the audience is turned into creative participants who engage with possibilities for mutual recognitions.

Here the mutual recognition is not discussed as merely a practice by a group belonging to a certain category that comes together for mutually recognising in one another a shared interest or a disrupted loss. Instead it entails forms of dialogical encounters that could produce transmutable experiences and collective practices for reconfiguration of knowledges in differences. As Grant Kester elaborates on Jean Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community*[27], modern human identities are always in negation and the "process of being formed and re-formed" through encounters with others.[28] Kester writes that "Communication, in whatever form, must involve some ontological and temporal framework (however provisional) within which to speak as well as listen."[29] As will be discussed further on the study of *Immigrant Movement International*, Tania Bruguera shares the same concern to create encountering environments for immigrants of various backgrounds to share and communicate beyond their roles and identities and even grow their impact on political strategies. In this sense mutual recognition is expanded into a practice involved within the transformative and instructive environments.

I suggest that the ability of 'environmenting' is a complex act, and that, therefore, it has to be found in complex forms of practice which share and circulate the notion of social in a mutual format. As mentioned above, the ability of 'environmenting' not only provides possibilities to recognise the situation of the field of its operation, but also enable the possibility to recognise those who are a part of such a situation and work with them. I argue that the practice of recognition has to be revisited and reinterpreted within the world of art and visual cultures today, while its capacity to develop mutuality is realised. Concerning the concept of recognition in relation to identity issues, multiculturalism, and political struggle, a series of assemblages juxtaposed to art and cultural studies provides possibilities for a counter-study as well as a need for other spaces of recognition. Therefore, through a parallel study of two examples—*The*

[27] Nancy, J. L., 1991, *The Inoperative Community*, Minneapolis and Oxford: University of Minnesota.
[28] Kester, ibid, p. 154.
[29] Ibid, p. 157.

Immigrant Movement International (2010–) by Tania Bruguera and *Calling* (1965) by Allan Kaprow—I aim to understand the problem of recognition through and within non-exhibitionary forms of practice. This is with the hope that understanding the ways in which collective operations formed within those practices may provide possibilities for mutual recognition.

1.3. Appearance/Co-Appearance at the Intricate State of Exhibition

The common understanding and critical analysis of the field of curatorial practice are embedded in and bounded by a central focus on exhibition making as both a representational and a presentational mode. It is representational by means of providing possibilities to display and showcase artworks in particular arrangements, and it is presentational by means of creating situations and environments through such displays in which the presence of the audience plays a crucial role. The "exhibitionary complex" formed its roots in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[30] As Tony Bennett writes, "Museums may have enclosed objects within walls, but the nineteenth century saw their doors opened to the general public."[31] The art world, which had been accessible only to the gaze of the highest class of society, by the nineteenth century had witnessed a great alteration in forms of representation. Nonetheless, this was merely a proliferation of the fundamental display of power in a new form, "as had been that of the people before the spectacle of punishment in the eighteenth century."[32]

As a result, the continued expansion of institutional power has raised numerous issues and concerns regarding the policies and processes of the organisation of systems as such. These forms of co-appearance within those environments impose and appropriate the components within the exhibition making, along with the forms of representations seen therein. Therefore, it speculates on the continuous relationships which develop among the increasing numbers of the producers (artists, curators, audience) and reinforces the global network of profit around them. To give an example, the Tate Report 2014/2015 gives a figure of nearly eight million visitors and almost two hundred and twenty-one million pounds total income.[33]

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[30] Bennett, T., 1995, "The Exhibitionary Complex", in *The Birth of the Museum, History, Theory, Politics*, London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis, pp. 59-88.
[31] Ibid, p. 59.
[32] Ibid.
[33] *Tate Report 2014/15*, available at http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/53001, accessed on 4 November 2015

FINANCE & STATISTICS

Audiences

Total visitor figures

8
7
6
5
(millions) 4
3
2
1
0

7,746,953 — 2012/13
7,036,490 — 2013/14
7,904,121 — 2014/15

Visitor figures 2014/15

TATE BRITAIN	1,373,489
TATE MODERN	5,702,374
TATE LIVERPOOL	597,768
TATE ST IVES	230,490
TOTAL	**7,904,121**

Tate St Ives main site closed until mid May 2014
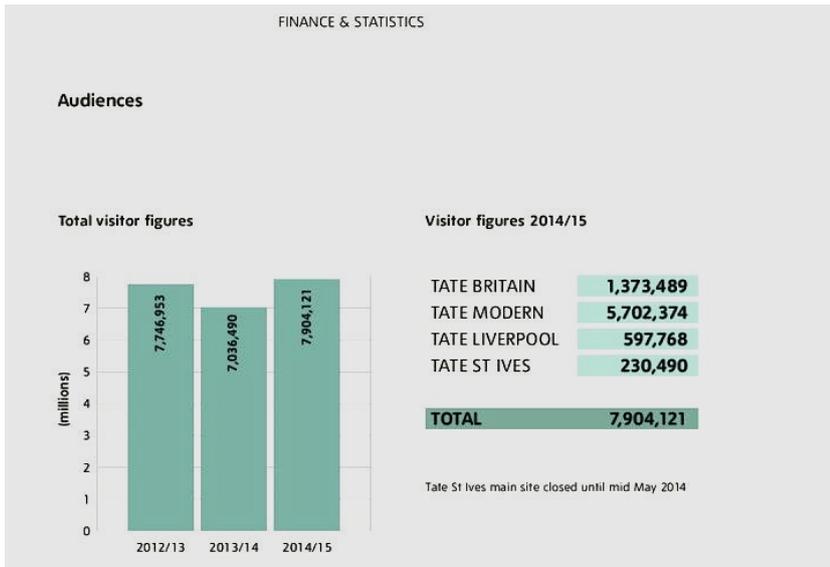
Tate Report 2014/15, available at http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/53001, accessed on 4 November 2015.

In the past few decades, various techniques have been honed that allow us to view exhibitions, democratising the sense of power and making the place of exhibition accessible to 'all'—not only to view artworks but also to be able to somehow 'participate' in the exhibition or in other activities in such space. Due to the degree to which exhibition making is historicised, the possibilities for critical analysis of its values and disruptions have increasingly expanded. This is not to claim that such values or disruptions are measurable; nonetheless, they provide commensurability of/for the incommensurable. In this regard, the site of exhibition and role of curator, as mediating between art making and presenting and/or art marketing and representing, are not exempt from critical analysis of their values or from violations of their representation.

To dominate the continuous power of display evident since the nineteenth-century museum exhibits, perhaps we need to first overcome the difficulties of dialogical and cognitive interchanges within the exhibitions. In the context of this chapter, the dialectical problematic of recognition as addressed in the INTRODUCTION could be dealt with through various possibilities within participatory environments and curatorial practices. How to make oneself or something recognised without being oppressed by the authority of the one who has the power to? The variety of social movements in the struggle of minorities (whether political, ethnic, sexual or religious) primarily seek the affirmation of their identities to the extent to which they engage in new forms of politics, such as 'identity politics' and/or 'politics of difference'.

To accommodate these politics within curatorial situations, the idea of appearing together and not as enclosed in a preexisting group but in mutual struggles and shared experiences involves the attempt to create spaces of coappearance within a different kind of group. Coappearing in this sense refers to situations in which the encounters between art objects, audience, participating artists, political groups and curators are intended as useful and of a dynamic kind so as to foster new types of exchanges and new practices of belonging. The aim would be to

create respectful platforms on which the distribution and representation of both bodies and objects are made, if not equally fulfilling, at least realised mutually.

For instance, Simon Sheikh makes a remark about the 1960s that was a developing point of departure towards the dematerialisation of the art object and the expanded field of art practices, which in return "has led to the establishing of new public platforms and formats, not just exhibition venues, but also the production of exhibitions in different types of venues, as well as creating venues that are not primarily for exhibition."[34] Furthermore, Paul O'Neill writes about the group exhibitions and co-productive form of exhibitions, "Since the 1960s, the group exhibition has opened up a range of curatorial approaches to demystify the role of mediation, and as such, has also enabled divergent artistic practices to be exhibited together under a single rubric."[35]

Where could there be a point of departure from which to find the potentials of exhibition as a possible ground for participation of the audience and to practice the co-appearances of artworks and audience? How can we locate the practices for which, in their movement between making and presenting, there is no violation from marketing and representing? A series of attempts in the exhibition making of the late 1920s plugged into a developing tendency towards very formalistic designs, which were, nonetheless, novel approaches in their time. Such experiments specifically demonstrate a great interest in geometrical designs within exhibitions, even as they address a peripheral approach to dealing with presentational modes of practice.

Left: *Werkbund Exhibition*, 1930, Paris (Bauhaus-Archiv Berlin © VG Bild-Kunst Bonn), and right: Herbert Bayer, Diagram Extend of Vision, 1935, available at http://imgur.com/gallery/RSp2ee6, accessed on 15 October 2012.

For obvious reasons, such as their very formalistic design-based methods, such exhibitions have blocked any possibility of curatorial analysis whatsoever; they reside in a completely different field. For example, German architect Mies Van Der Rohe and designer Lilly Reich, in the *Women's Fashion Exhibition* (1927, Berlin), presented The Velvet and Silk Café. This employed hanging panels of golden silk to create the open, fluid spaces that modern architects were

[34] Sheikh, S., 2009, "Objects of Study or Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research," in *ART & RESEARCH: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods,* volume 2, no. 2. p.2, available at http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v2n2/sheikh.html, accessed on 10 April 2014.

[35] O'Neill, P., 2014, "Co-productive Exhibition-Making and Three Principal Categories of Organisation: The Background, the Middle-ground and the Foreground," in *Curating: Politics and Display*, available at http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-22-43/co-productive-exhibition-making-and-three-principal-categories-of-organisation-the-background-the-background-the-ground-and-the-foregrou.html#.VqvAEDbPzR0, pp. 22-34, accessed on 13 March 2013.

beginning to explore. In the 1929 *International Exposition in Barcelona*, Reich's project of a textile display for installing floating glass walls recalls the famed German pavilion designed by Mies. The two often used a similar format, sharing material at the spotlight of fashion and design fields and often presenting multiple industrial production techniques. Herbert Muschamp writes, "Reich's emphasis on process sometimes resulted in displays of startlingly contemporary appearance. Planks of raw timber stacked on the floor look forward to Minimalist sculpture. A double row of beer bottles strongly evokes Pop."[36] The problem of how these practices were related to design and architecture—in a general sense—made an emphasis on geometrical forms and pure aesthetics unavoidable in the formation of their work.

Insisting on the appropriation of exhibition making generated a slightly unalike platform for indifferent and interchangeable singulars trying to astonish people. Nevertheless, design continued to be the prominent point. This slight dissimilarity in the format, despite its intention to rethink the position of the audience within the exhibition space, produced spectacular designed environments within which the audiences became a part of the operational system.[37] Not only in architectural strategies on how to design an exhibition, but also in more artistic projects within the 'fine arts,' similar issues around form-oriented interests were at stake.

Consequently, in the search for the potentialities of co-appearance in the space of exhibitions a different direction—away from architectural and design-based practices—must be taken. Various attempts to be attentive to understanding an altered approach to exhibition making were explored. The turning point was embodied in a new approach in art and, in particular, working with the exhibition as a space of presentation. For instance, Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore's *An Exhibit* (1957), similar to other exhibitions presented by the two artists over the following years, is one of many examples of how artists have focused on the formality of the exhibition or exhibition as form.

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[36] Muschamp, H., 1996, "ARCHITECTURE REVIEW; A Modernist Steps Out of the Shadows," in *The New York Times*, 9 February available at http://www.nytimes.com/1996/02/09/arts/architecture-review-a-modernist-steps-out-of-the-shadows.html, accessed on 18 November 2012.

[37] Other examples which displayed a novel approach to exhibition making include Russian artist El Lissitzky's exhibition *Pressa*, 1928, in Cologne; Austrian-American artist Herbert Bayer's stipulation on a user's experience of exhibitions, *Field of Vision*, which was later employed by Walter Gropius, László Moholy-Nagy, Josef Breuer, and Herbert Bayer for the design of the *Werkbund* exhibition, 1930, in Paris; and Austrian-Hungarian artist Frederick Kiesler's design for the gallery Art of This Century in New York in 1942.
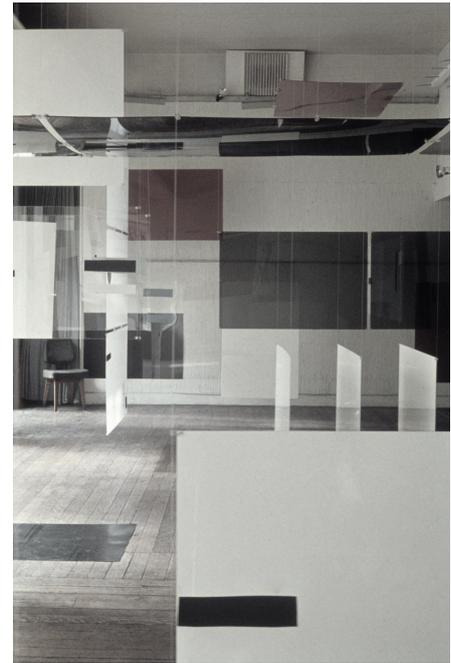
Left: Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore installing *An Exhibit*, 1957 © Estate of Victor Pasmore. DACS 2015. Photo: John Pasmore. Middle and right: *An Exhibit*, record of installation at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1957 © Richard Hamilton Studio.

Hamilton had already tackled this type of exhibition making in his 1951 exhibition *Growth and Form,* and to some degree *An Exhibit* revisited his interest in the representational elements of exhibition. *An Exhibit* showed the Modernist ideal of 'art as accessible', following the idea of democratisation of art for all. Isabelle Moffat writes, "Still, it was Hamilton who demonstrated a persistent interest in using exhibitions to communicate specific and complex ideas about the nature of vision. The displays were effectively used to present his research and to engage the spectator both intellectually and viscerally."[38] Specifically, such intentions depart from a purely design-based approach towards a more effective and research-based direction for exhibition making. In the case of *An Exhibit*, a completely aesthetic approach to the display of arranged photographs, paintings, the play of shadows of the different elements, and wall segments that were extended up high so as to use the ceiling as a surface for installation, were the exhibition's main endeavour.

An Exhibit was a labyrinth of grey, white, and brown acrylic sheets hanging by thin wires and intermingled with a red see-through panel, providing a physical experience for the audience. This experience was given via spatial design and the architectural approach, by means of directing the bodily movement of the audience. There is no doubt that *An Exhibit* was a different form of practice at the time of its production. Hence, the formal quality of the display relates to spatial design within and through exhibition making. Nonetheless, on the one hand, the panels both delimit space and stand as fragments of space and, on the other hand, they place an obligation on the viewers, by leading them within the corridor arrangements of the space. In this way, the

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[38] Moffat, I., August 2015, "Richard Hamilton and Victor Pasmore, *An Exhibit*, 1957," from THE ARTIST AS CURATOR #1, *Mousse,* no. 42, available at http://moussemagazine.it, accessed on 12 November 2015.

design of the space would oblige the viewers, on occasion, to stand still in front of an entirely see-through panel to view the artwork.

Nevertheless, the 'exhibitionary' formats remained no more than an outline or a look. As such, the search for potentials of exhibition making to find a possibility for 'environmenting' comes to an end as soon as it departs towards any form of circulation between audience and the event of exhibiting. The problem with this form of exhibition making remained with its subordinate position. Yet the experiences of particular and new forms of display were turning normal exhibition spaces into unusual, fragmented places through a process of deconstruction. As a result, the new approach to exhibition making not only appeared unusual to the audience; it also invited them to walk the exhibition spaces differently. Because of this, some forms of co-appearances are identifiable in this particular way of displaying.

These artists largely adopted the possibilities of exhibition design as a way of giving instructions for the display of their practice. Thus, this category of exhibitions revolves around the form and visuality of the representation, rather than a substantial assertion of what is represented or the ideas behind the exhibition's design. The spaces of representation within the exhibitionary structures were occupied predominantly with design and visual elements, to a degree to which the bodily experience of viewers overwhelmed any mental or conceptual involvement as such.

1.4. <u>Withdrawing Artist and/or Artwork from the State of Exhibition</u>

At this stage, it is necessary to retrace a path somewhere beyond the obstructions of design within the exhibition spaces. Studies of exhibition making as a mediatory mode eventually suggest some other aspect that is neither the units of design production nor the systems of artwork commodity circulation, but is rather an exteriority of the two. In other words, co-appearance in relation to the exhibitionary mode has to be approached differently and studied as a possible space of 'environmenting'. In attempting to recognise the possibilities of 'environmenting' within the spaces of exhibition making, I explore the hidden and unexposed spaces of co-appearance. Sites of exhibition, situations of representation, as well as the spaces of collective participants are the necessary components which form this particular methodology for exhibition making. To understand the ways in which these components connect with one another, the approximate distance between each and all of them is a vital aspect of this complexity. Such complexity has to be examined alongside what is in between these components or what comprises them. I intend to study this here through the notion of 'withdrawal'.

Taking this into account, the question is how the complicated and intricate space of exhibiting can have a potential for presenting any form of 'environmenting' ability. From one perspective, the way in which an exhibition is planned and begins, the posing and juxtaposing of particular objects, the spaces of exhibition, the duration and the means by which it finishes (if there is an ending), as well as elements such as its structure, layout of the artworks, and the textual material are some components of the environment of exhibiting. From another perspective, the public appearance and response, the debates and writings which inform the exhibition, and the publications during and subsequent to the exhibition are also elements which co-appear within the indicated structure.

In *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s),* Paul O'Neill, while discussing Lissitzky's exhibitions as being on the frontier of a design-oriented form of exhibition making, suggests, "As Georg Simmel and Walter Benjamin had most notably predicted, the birth of the modern city brought about citizen passivity and distance between people, while encouraging new forms of capitalist consumption, through master-planning, projects—road building and the gridding of residential areas."[39] To understand the connection of potentialities for co-appearances in such contexts, it is essential to study the opposing points of departure for a reassessment of the traditionally passive experience of the exhibition. The new forms of exhibition making entailed a bodily involvement of viewers through a different form of representation, which will be discussed further below.

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[39] O'Neill, P., 2012, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)*, London: MIT Press.

The First Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme, in 1938 in Paris, and the *First Papers of Surrealism*, in 1942 in New York, were produced by the Surrealist group, which included the French writer André Breton, the French poet Paul Éluard, the French artist Marcel Duchamp, the Spanish artist Salvador Dalí, the German artist Max Ernst, and the French artist Man Ray. These exhibitions structured and delivered unusual sets of relations among the presented components and, by doing so, pushed their boundaries beyond the conventional display. By conditioning the space of exhibition to provide the audience with an extraordinary experience, these exhibitions reveal a potential for ways in which the alteration of representational methods could allow other possibilities of co-appearances to emerge.

The First Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme was held in February 1938, a few months before the beginning of the Second World War and the declaration of the Franco-American friendship. To contextualise the political condition further, this exhibition took place just before French Prime Minister Léon Blum announced his support for the Czechoslovakian government, stating that France would honour its agreement to aid Czechoslovakia in the event of German invasion. Of course, this exhibition neither directly mirrored these political affairs nor reflected on them, but it borrowed some elements from the complicated political context. To do so, the display structure provided a condition so that the viewing spaces offered the possibility for an unusual and relatively uncomfortable experience.

Thus, objects and materials that were installed alongside the artworks demonstrated an innovative approach to exhibition making. The installation of the whole show represented an anti-aesthetic approach to create a dynamic environment. To begin with,1200 coal sacks, similar to sandbags used for military fortification, were hung from the ceiling, not only to create a strange visual experience but also to provide a physically uncomfortable condition for the visitors. Furthermore, in order to view the artworks, each visitor was asked to carry a torch while traversing the dark gallery space. As Lewis Kachur suggests, "in each setting the participants abandoned any attempt at neutrality of presentation in favour of a subjective environment that itself embodied a statement."[40]

While the purpose of exhibition is, in a broad sense, to allow the audience to view the artworks, the curated situation of *The First Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme* created an environment for the visitors to engage in a process of appearing in an unfamiliar zone and, to some extent, to perform within this zone. Participatory acts as such had novelty at the time, and they provided a space for mental and bodily involvement. But more significant is the potential to confuse and dynamise such configurations of the space and situation to deliver a more productive and participatory space. The created environment reversed the expectations of the visitors to the exhibition by essentially obstructing them from viewing the artworks as one customarily would. This has placed the viewer in a different position than that of a passive viewer, or, in other words, has displaced them into a kind of corporeal involvement.

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[40] Kachur, L., 2001, *Displaying the Marvelous, Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dali, and Surrealist Exhibition Installations,* Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England: The MIT Press, p. xiii.

Moreover, the use of various readymade objects within the exhibition juxtaposed a remarkable combination of body and machine and interrupted the expectancy of seeing only 'artworks' inside an exhibition. The artists played recorded sound and included a coffee machine with a strong smell to expand the environment more dynamically by triggering the visitor's senses into a more conscious present. Given that the exhibition took place in days of political crisis, the opening event indirectly addressed some particular approaches to the notion of appearance. For instance, some newspapers reviewed the exhibition and interpreted the vernissage as a political demonstration of its own kind.[41]

The First Exposition Internationale du Surrealisme, February 1938, Galerie Beaux-Arts, Paris.

The *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition was held in the United States following the migration of many of the European Surrealists during the Second World War. After the occupation of France by Germany, nine of the members of this artist group had to leave their country and go through the legal process of citizenship application. This exhibition was titled The *First Papers of Surrealism* to reflect on the paperwork of these immigration processes. The show was held at the Whitelaw Reid mansion in New York in 1942. The building was the premises of a war relief agency, the Coordinating Council of French Relief Societies. The exhibition was part of its humanitarian activities, organised to raise funds for French prisoners and the adoption of children orphaned and displaced by the war.

With the title of the exhibition, the artists aimed to underline the émigré's status, pointing to the sociopolitical atmosphere that was created as a result of the ongoing war. Duchamp, one member of the Surrealist group, installed numerous lines of string throughout the exhibition space, in between the panels on which the paintings were installed. For the viewer, gaining access to the paintings as a bodily experience thus became a crucial task; nevertheless, from a considerable distance the paintings were viewable. The created distance between the paintings

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[41] See., ibid., pp. 96-101.

and the viewers, forming a space through which the function of representation was reassigned differently. One could say that as a result both the artworks and the audience co-appeared in a new position.

By installed a number of strings throughout the space, Duchamp transformed the mansion's former drawing room. The exhibition space was filled with paintings, hung on portable partitions, which constituted the overwhelming bulk of what was on show. The entangled net did not cover up the paintings fully; instead, it intended to create a disturbing situation, building a barrier between the spectator and the works of art. This created the possibility of rethinking the position of the spectator and allowed the new potentials to emerge from the exhibition space.

More importantly, at the vernissage, Duchamp created a particular environment in which the notion of 'withdrawal' was quite remarkably triggered. He did not attend the opening night of the exhibition and instead sent a few carefully instructed children to the reception to play within the gallery space. Children were playing with a ball or jumping about on hopscotch courses; if asked, they were to indicate that they were playing at the command of Duchamp. As such, Duchamp could maintain his virtual presence at the show. His ideas, peculiar for the time, resulted from an interest in different modes of representation and provided an unknown space with which one could engage differently.

The 'withdrawal' of the artist from the situation anticipates a return or a 're-placing', back into a different position. The visitors were disturbed by the unexpected and inappropriate acts of the children, explained by the mentioning of Duchamp's name, which replaced the bodily absence of the artist.[42] This approximate presentation, the 'withdrawal' of the artist from the event of the exhibition, seems to allow a different position for both the artist and the audience. Moreover, the representational format shows a displaced normality to inhabit the space differently. In other words, in this example Duchamp initiates the creation of an environment by 'withdrawing' and replacing.

It could be said that the installation of the show, with miles of string throughout, set a distance between the artworks and the audience to maybe regain a more conscious presence inside the exhibition space. Nonetheless, the opening of the exhibition and the reception of the show were even more unusual. Given the site of the exhibition, the Whitelaw Reid mansion, and its affiliation with the French council, wealthy art patrons and members of New York's cultural elite attended the vernissage. Duchamp's 'withdrawal' from the vernissage might be also seen as an attempt to distance himself from the elite culture. Furthermore, the strange web or net of strings distancing the viewers from the artwork could be read as the effects of such culture, alienating the viewer from the 'actual art'.

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[42] One of the children was quoted in *Surrealism in Exile and the Beginning of the New York School:* "We were encouraged to run about and I remember feeling somewhat uncomfortable both because I didn't think it was proper behaviour and also because I sensed that some of the guests were of the same opinion." Kachur, ibid, p. 196.

The ability of 'environmenting' could be outlined in this case, when the surroundings and its forces are turned within as a result of a collective process of 'withdrawals' and emergence of a different audience. Within the environment as such, the exhibition is no longer a place for representing the artworks; it is, rather, the presentation itself, and a collective presentation. This form of presentation, the created event of co-appearance of children and audiences as well as the disappearance of the artist, renders the represented painting and artworks as simply part of the event, and not the single determined unit of this circulation.

As a result, it could be said that one part of Duchamp's attempts at formatting collective spaces was the act of 'withdrawal' of the artist and the repositioning of the audience. A similar approach, with a slightly different perspective, can be seen in Yves Klein's *The Void* (Le Vide), but by 'withdrawal' of the artwork and repositioning of the audience. The full title of the work was *La spécialisation de la sensibilité à l'état matière première en sensibilité picturale stabilisée, Le Vide* (The Specialisation of Sensibility in the Raw Material State into Stabilised Pictorial Sensibility, *The Void*), and the event took place in the Iris Clert Gallery in Paris, in 1958.
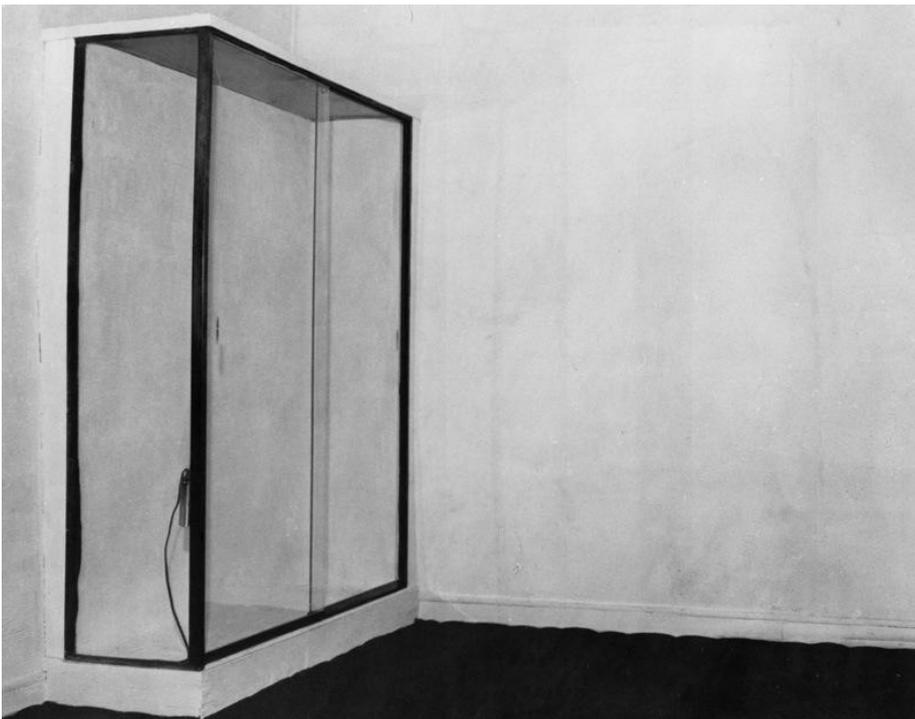
Yves Klein, *The Void*, 1958, exhibition view.

At this event, Klein, a fairly well-known artist at the time, removed everything from the exhibition space except for a large, empty display cabinet. Klein painted all of the surfaces of the space white and orchestrated an elegant entry for the guests at the opening night. He painted the gallery window blue and hung a blue curtain in the lobby. For the opening, Klein had designed invitation cards, and the opening night was supplemented by the presence of security guards,

the serving of blue cocktails, and the recital of a speech. Klein writes, in his notes about this piece,

> "I had left the visible, physical blue at the door, outside, in the street. The real blue was inside, the blue of the profundity of space … the immaterialisation of blue, the coloured space that cannot be seen but which we impregnate ourselves with."[43]

Klein thus created an unfamiliar environment for the presentation of 'nothing'—so to speak—as a strong statement. Klein's employment of institutional norms, including invitation cards, security guards, and an opening ceremony, in order to display abnormality in 'nothing', results in a powerful, critical artwork proposed through the act of 'withdrawal'. Through the notion of immateriality, he intends to highlight a predisposition of exhibition space and signals a different state of being to the audience. In a sense, the audience members are repositioned, so that they appear cooperatively in relation to the other elements within the exhibit. In his notes, Klein writes,

> "I created a 'monotone' symphony whose theme is what I want my life to be. This symphony lasts for forty minutes and consists of one single, continuous, long-drawn-out 'sound'; it has neither beginning nor end, which creates a dizzy feeling, a sense of aspiration, of sensibility outside and beyond time."[44]

In this statement, he shows some of the links between *The Void* and other aspects of his artistic practice, and demonstrates his dynamic approach to art making. Through the 'withdrawal' and replacing of some components at the opening event of the exhibition, a transformational mode is established. By doing so, he puts forward an unfamiliar feeling and an unaccustomed situation for the audience. The artist's work is the removal of the art objects that would be anticipated to be seen at the opening of an exhibition, and the repurposing of elements such as invitation cards and reception ceremony that would commonly be used in formal institutional presentations. The curated environment creates an unfamiliar co-appearance for everyone who attended the event.

Although Klein's theological interests might suggest that some of the approaches to invisibility in his work are rooted in Christianity, the text written for the opening ceremony implies that his interest is in the created environment more than anything else:

> "Create for me an exceptional atmosphere, let an inexpressible sound fill both the spiritual and existential ears of all the visitors, [and] let an invisible yet real and powerfully and terribly beautiful light raise this event to the highest spiritual and existential level of vision. Let everyone without exception see the supernatural that is in Art so that faith, the new faith of Art, may enter into the all, and all men may enter into a great new worldwide civilisation of the beautiful. So be it."[45]

By removing the pre-existing attachments to the religious belief system in his claim, and remaining cautious regarding the risk of his idealistic view of art, Klein's practice shows a certain

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[43] Klein, Y. 1974, *1928–1962 Selected Writings*, J&J, London: Tate Modern, p. 35.
[44] Ibid, p. 14.
[45] Ibid, p. 33.

realisation of a potential for 'environmenting' in the dynamic spaces of his work. By addressing the absence that is produced through the removal of any solid representation of artwork, he creates an experience for a substitutable representation of the audience and a different possibility for a collective act of co-appearance. In other words, the intentional absence of the visual existences of art objects has changed by the situation of a collective act. In this respect, what can be inferred from this form of representation is that the position of the audience at the exhibition is an active and integral part of the concept, and one which is altered considerably from the norm.

I argue that the circulating mode, generated 'with' the new spaces in the exhibition, represents traces of new potentials in the field of curating. The space of exhibition is constituted by complexities, which are shaped in the relations between the presences and absences. The connotations of the co-appearance of the audience attending the event, in which the 'withdrawal' of the artworks and/or artists has created unfamiliar spaces, enable 'environmenting'. Thus the emergence of new ways of working with exhibitions in the first half of the twentieth century was a significant and innovative move, which fostered the expansion of curating from the second half of the century to the present. The juxtaposition of the audience and 'withdrawal' of the artists and artworks within the intricate space of exhibition provided a vantage point from which the hidden potentials of the curatorial moment gained a new presence.

To what extent does 'environmenting' as ability deal with the partiality of curatorial practice? To what degree can possibilities for the merging and emerging of collective knowledges be produced through such ways of doing? The act of 'withdrawal' in relation to the space of exhibition as discussed in the above examples allows for the potentials of representation. This sense of spatiality has to be understood as a socially oriented form of operating when the presentation is not limited to some particular units, i.e., artworks, but is expanded to the unexpected and/or to the unmediated spaces of exhibiting that are yet to be known. As noted earlier, my intention in revisiting the artistic practices is to rethink the spaces and places of cultural productions along a different path. In doing so, an extraordinary potential for the reconfiguration of collective knowledge through curated situations provides possibilities to expand within and beyond the practice of exhibition making.

1.5. <u>A Turning Point</u>

Existing debates on exhibition making, as the mostly recognisable aspect of curating, are focused predominantly on power relations and on the role of curators and artists. Curators have been either highly glorified or tremendously criticised for their role as mediators, making the world of art more accessible for audiences and artists. I argue that both of these opposing points of view are equally problematic in relying their arguments too much on the role of curators or artists, disregarding the exhibition as a collective complex.

In an interview with Stuart Jeffries and Nancy Groves, Hans Ulrich Obrist suggests, "[Sergei] Diaghilev and [Jean] Cocteau tried to explain what they did with the words: 'Etonnez moi!' Astonish me. I've never had an art practice, and I've never thought of the curator as a creative rival to the artist. When I became a curator, I wanted to be helpful to artists. I think of my work as that of a catalyst—and sparring partner."[46] Regarding the role of curator as a position of a facilitator, with the aim of helping the artist to astonish the viewer even more, seems to be a humble approach. However, disregarding the creative and dynamic capacity of the curatorship seems limiting and bounded to the distinctive roles of artist and curator.

Approaches such as Obrist's have several negative effects: (a) to reduce art to being the object of amusement, (b) to limit the curatorial act to a linear one, and (c) to disable other potentialities into rigid ideas. In contrast, to analyse curatorial practice I intend to detach from the determination of different positions and move towards a study of the abilities that enable different potentials. In this thesis, my intention is to recognise and appreciate a different approach to the field of curatorial work, wherein any emphasis on the power of the 'doers' is dissolved into the 'processes of doing'. In other words, the complexity of the curatorial practice should be seen in the multiplicity of different capacities and various potentials by which they cooperate through certain abilities in a collective mode. With this in mind, an exhibition has to be viewed from a perspective of an apparatus for thinking, or as a medium for the reproduction of knowledges by those who participate in it.

This methodology has been critically viewed and recently historicised by studies of the relations among curators, artists, the public, and the art institutions. For instance, in November 2009, Simon Sheikh gave a lecture at the Former West Congress (Utrecht, Netherlands) titled "A Conceptual History of Exhibition-Making". Sheikh raised the urgency of a typological approach to exhibition making and to both its history and its counter-history. Another example took place in 2010, when Afterall (a publishing and research organisation based in London) launched a series of books titled *Exhibition Histories.* The series of books analyses various events from the middle

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[46] Interviews by Stuart Jeffries and Nancy Groves, 23 March 2014, "Hans Ulrich Obrist: The art of Curation," *The Guardian*, available at http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2014/mar/23/hans-ulrich-obrist-art-curator, accessed on 25 May 2014.

of the last century, as well as contemporary practices, and examines the crucial status of these exhibitions to the conceptualisation of art today.

Another instance happened within the academic field in March 2013 at the University of Edinburgh, where a symposium titled The Exhibition and Its Histories examined the reasons that the historicisation of the exhibition has come into currency at this specific time. Under close examination, the shift from the artworks to the exhibitions in these debates is a remarkable alteration. As Sheikh points out, the question we must ask is what it means to shift from object to exhibition:

> "Since 1989, we have not only seen (geo) political and cultural changes in Europe, former West and East alike, but also a renewed interest in the exhibition as the main vehicle for contemporary art, not only in terms of presentation, but also production: the exhibition as medium."[47]

As much as the conceptualisation of exhibition making and the ideas behind the shift in emphasis from artworks to exhibition are important to consider, the actual potentials of sociality and collectivity which emerge from exhibition making as a mode of creative activity must also be reconfigured further. Correspondingly, questions such as why this way of doing is relatively growing in the contemporary artistic practice and how one could see other potentialities in the shift from object to exhibition as a medium must be considered. Also, one must be cautious of the risk that the exhibition could become yet another closed object in itself. Hence, to recognise the potentials of exhibition making, we need to turn our focus beyond the capacities and/or role of the doers and to spaces and situations on which the curatorial moments take places.

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[47] Sheikh, S., 7 November 2009, "A Conceptual History of Exhibition-Making", paper presented at the 1st Former West Congress, Ottone, Utrecht, Netherlands, available at
http://www.formerwest.org/ResearchCongresses/1stFormerWestCongress/Video/AConceptualHistoryOfExhibitionMaking/, accessed on 18 January 2013.

1.6.   A Ground for Mutual Recognition

Assemblages of spaces of recognition through and within sites of collective acts or forms of community will form the central pattern of the following section. On the one hand, I will explore the importance of recognisability in socially oriented forms of practice, and on the other hand, I will appreciate mutual recognition and co-appearances insofar as they are an aspect of 'environmenting'. I will structure my argument through a study of, *Immigrant Movement International* (2010, ongoing) by Tania Bruguera and *Calling* (1965) by Allan Kaprow. In both of these practices, an environment of collective acts is created and aspects of curatorship could be viewed in their methods of operation. Nevertheless, I will argue that while *Calling* takes an absolute approach to the collective environment, *Immigrant Movement International* interrupts this environment into various spaces. These ideas will be complicated with the multilayered and dynamic domain of non-exhibitionary formats. This requires some clarification of my field of investigation, which I intend to deliver through questions including these:

- What does recognition mean, and based on what sorts of values does a form of recognition take place?
- What sorts of cross-reference provide possibilities for mutual recognition within interrupted community?
- How can the dialectical nature of recognition, which is both something to give and something to gain, be articulated in the form of a collective practice?

Recognition "is a vital human need."[48] This necessity has been critically discussed in politics, the social theories, and philosophy, yet to understand it within the contemporary art field it needs to be studied further.[49] The new forms of contemporary art practices suggest that 'recognition' must be fearlessly reinterpreted and addressed differently in the visual cultures and art world of today. The problem with recognition by means of the acknowledged spaces of 'cultural heritage' or 'credited institutions,' which have a valuable position within the economic system, is that it is only attainable when specific standards are met. This eventually renders recognition of distinguished artworks, produced by distinguished artists, in the thematised spaces of curated exhibitions that provide possibilities for such recognition. The difficulty with this system is the closed network operating mostly amongst those 'distinguished' artists and curators. As a consequence, the artists and curators have excessive influence on the production of art and culture appropriated to their specific perception. The site of co-appearances is then formed by gatherings of distinguished

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[48] Taylor, C., 1992, "The Politics of Recognition" in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, Gutman, A., (ed.), Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, p. 26.

[49] For further study on sociological and philosophical perspectives on recognition, see Honneth, A., 1995, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, Cambridge: Polity Press and Fraser, N. and Honneth, A. 2003, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, London: Verso.

viewers, artists, and collectors, or 'Very Important People', to keep it short. To grasp a better understanding of recognition as it concerns 'environmenting' we have to look elsewhere.

'Recognition', in a sense that refers to intellectual comprehension—forms of shared identification through dialogical encounters—is the concern of this argument. 'Recognition' starts off at a point of confusion, in which some A takes B as X. As Heikki Ikäheimo and Arto Laitinen write, "In all cases A is a person or collective of persons, but the B's and X's differ, depending on whether what is at stake is a case of identification, acknowledgement or recognition."[50] The concern here might be a matter of identifying or acknowledging one as one or the simultaneity of the two. However, most important is the recognition of disrupted and distributed selves. In other words, the act of recognition is a means of realising the social in its interrupted cross-referencing.

It is important to note that this is not done with the intention of valorising or devaluing a group or an individual per se. Rather, it is a stage that serves as a place of nonshared identification. It is the notion of identification itself. In this formula, not only is/are someone(s) recognised by other/s, but furthermore, the one who is recognised judges the one who recognises, as to whether they are capable of recognition or not. This eventually suggests a reciprocal relation between the recogniser and the recognised, in giving and taking the recognition as a produced form of knowledge amongst them.

In a sense, the recognition of the condition shared by A and B equally and at the same time constitutes itself through a mutual relation. The recognition of the self by the self could imply more than substitution of the self, while juxtaposing the notion of recognition and validation. Self-recognition, when posed in the analysis of the concept of 'I can', also relates closely to the problem of identification. The passage of the self and the other, has been explored in the notion of recognisability and its urgency in the contemporary field of art. By exploring community-based art practices, Grant Kester suggests that "If any collective identity is inherently corrupt, then the only legitimate goal of community art practice is to challenge or unsettle the viewer' reliance on such a form of identification."[51] Focusing on the situations of art communities and the way they shape one deals with distributed bodies of artists, curators, and audiences to take a stand at a point of confusion between the bodies and their sociopolitical associations as community.

With this in mind, recognition must be read as the collapse of two trajectories together. On the one hand, identity issues and the formation of sociopolitical movements have formed a series of concerns around difference and multiculturalism in the arts and visual cultures. On the other hand, concern with political theories of recognition and its effects on the formation of individuality and the self has produced a number of works of literature and debates in art

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[50] See., Ikäheimo, H., & Laitinen, A., 2007, "Analysing Recognition: Identification, Acknowledgement, and Recognitive Attitudes Towards Persons" in *Recognition and Power: Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Social Theory*, Van den Brink, E., & Owen, D., eds., New York: CUP, p. 33-56.
[51] Kester, G. H., ibid, p. 159.

theory and cultural criticism.[52] To understand the move from the social as an absolute conception to the social as an interrupted conception, a different approach to the knowledge of society is required. Being social, as Nancy argues, "is essentially a matter of being exposed."[53] Being social is not an intrinsic form of being. Rather, it exists in "the network and cross-referencing [*le renvoi mutuel*] of co-existence that is of co-existence."[54] Resonating with the social, as in art communities and collective practices, represents co-appearances. The cross-referencing or mutual relation, which is characteristic of the social, then becomes a vital point in social co-appearance and, correspondingly, in community art practice. Through methods of interruptions, not only could mutual recognisability occur in the community, but also possibilities could provide reconfiguration of the given understanding that we have of society.

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[52] Attempts in the political theory of recognition to reconfigure the concept of 'just' in relation to withheld recognition have tended to compare it with multiculturalism as a form of inhabiting and respecting differences. The importance of social relationships to the expansion and inhabitation of identity issues and social struggles has had one foot in the field of social science developed from the tradition of the Frankfurt School, while its other foot has been in a more newly produced understanding on self-realisation and the identification of inter-subjective conditions and the authoritative struggles rooted back in the Hegelian legacy. For more on this, see Ikäheimo, H. and Laitinen*, A., eds. 2011, *Recognition and Social Ontology*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, Social and Critical Theory: A Critical Horizons Book Series.

[53] Nancy, J. L., 2000, *Being Singular Plural*, Richardson, R. D., & O'Byrne, A. E., trans., Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, p. 69.

[54] Ibid.

1.7. <u>Know the Unknown Migrant</u>
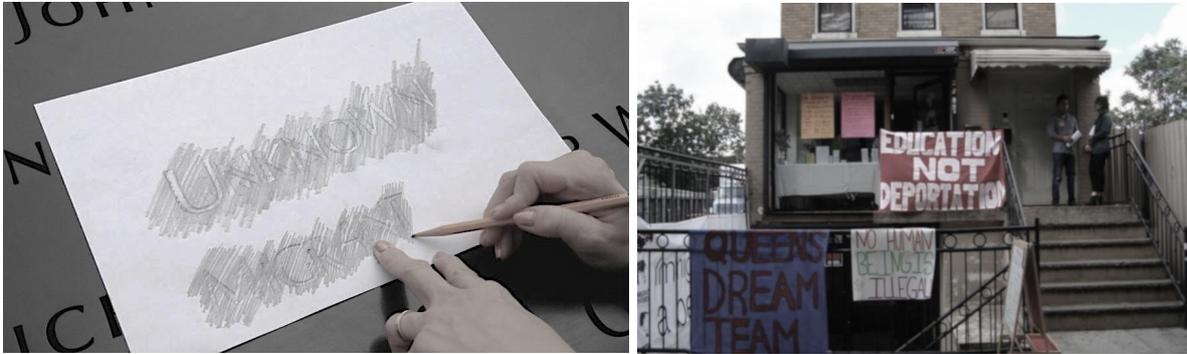
Left: "To the Unknown Migrant – 9/11 Memorial" The 9/11 Memorial, New York, 2012, an event by *Immigrant Movement International* at Novella Gallery with Tania Bruguera, Alexandra Délano, Camilo Godoy, and Benjamin Nienass. Right: View of *Immigrant Movement International* headquarters, in Corona, New York. *IM International* is a collaborative project between Queens Museum's staff and artist Tania Bruguera, initially conceived as a centre for creative political actions and an international think tank for examining migration in the twenty-first century. Image courtesy of the Queens Museum, New York.

> "When dreams are cast aside as impossible, when social promises become utopia, when equality is co-opted, this is the point at which my art begins."[55]

Immigrant Movement International (*IM International*), usually described as a long-term art project, arose from the practical importance of bringing together different forms of activities in its structure as a social reality. This has expanded into the form of an artist-initiated sociopolitical movement. A series of speculative stories are one part of the repertoire of cultural representations, which form the ways in which its participants organise and reproduce their social life together. Located in Corona, New York, *IM International*, one of Tania Bruguera's projects, began in 2010 and is still underway.[56]

Aimed at engaging both with local and international communities in particular projects, as well as operating alongside social service organisations, elected representatives, and artists with a focus on immigration reform, this practice suggests a particular approach to the notion of recognisability, one which deals with systems of oppressive social constitutions.

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[55]Bruguera, T., December 2011, *When Dreams Are Cast Aside as Impossible*, available at http://www.taniabruguera.com, accessed on 5 March 2013.

[56] Corona, founded at the height of the Southern California citrus boom in 1886, is advantageously situated at the upper end of the Santa Ana River Canyon, the only significant pass through the Santa Ana Mountains. The town of Corona once laid claim to the title "Lemon Capital of the World". A museum there presents the lemon's former role in the local economy. The city derived its name (and its nickname, The Circle City) from the curious layout of its streets, with a standard grid enclosed by the circular Grand Boulevard, one mile in diameter. Cf., Embry, J. L., ed., 2013, *Oral History, Community, and Work in the American West,* Tuscan: University of Arizona Press, p. 84.

The condition from within which *IM International* began to address the problems of immigration, through a series of projects, formed an initial 'we'. Both as immigrants and as cultural practitioners, participants in this project tap into the fundamental elements of contemporary social life: problems around and within immigration and the question of what it means to be part of such social reality. "The status and identity of those who live outside their place of origin", as Bruguera states, "increasingly become defined not by sharing a common language, class, culture, or race, but instead by their condition as immigrants."[57]

This shared condition designates a general 'self-referentiality' within a space-time and organises them through curatorial strategies. The concept of recognition in this sense operates in two ways. On the one hand, *IM International* recognises sets of social and political problems of immigration that are caused by a larger-scale geopolitical system. On the other hand, the project gives recognition individually and on a smaller scale to those immigrants who are involved in it. Through working with the local community in public workshops, events, actions, and partnerships with immigrant and social service organisations, *IM International* examines the questions of 'who is an immigrant?' and 'what values do immigrants share?'

"The Little School of Thought Community Transit Amaguaña", at *Immigrant Movement International*, 2010. Image courtesy of the artist and the Queens Museum of Art, New York.

The title of *IM International* was a proposed commencement for replacement of the term 'immigrant', that literally and psychologically tried to transform the sociopolitical understanding of this contemporary issue. Bruguera was initially motivated by the civil conflicts in the Paris banlieues in 2005, which were led mainly by Arabic, North African, and other black heritage second-generation immigrants. The problems, such as the deficiency of political representation on the one hand and the lack of any form of committed negotiations from politicians with respect to the large immigrant community on the other, led to the creation of the *IM International*.

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[57] *Immigrant Movement International*, available at https://www.e-flux.com/announcements/35773/immigrant-movement-international, accessed on 6 March 2013.

The first event took place in early April 2011, when Bruguera had her first meeting with some of the immigrants in her neighbourhood of Corona. The idea was for the participants to come up with one-phrase slogans by which to positively portray the immigrant population in America. Phrases such as "Everyone Was Once an Immigrant", "I Take Care of Your Children. Don't Mistreat Mine", and "We Are Immigrants, Just Like Your Grandparents" were suggested by the participants.[58] The slogans were used in the subsequent events, in the form of posters and flyers, which were handed out at public gatherings in the city.

Curatorial strategies such as establishing a number of think tanks with the participants, who were the immigrants living in the neighbourhood, as well as participating together in public gatherings such as May Day celebrations, provided possibilities for the recognition of immigration issues amongst the group.[59] Giving such recognition to a socially constituted group also provided opportunities for discussions around questions on what it means to be an immigrant, from both inside and outside of the group, and also made possible the creation of forms of collectives which expanded those recognitions and represented such cultural glitches elsewhere.

In thinking of the fugitive mode of the art of social life, *IM International* is a method of rehearsal, which recognises a deeply inherited problematic of our social relations. Not only does it hope to offer solutions, but also, through collectively operated policies and planning, it provides instances of how to reproduce such optimism while recognising the ways in which it can be politically misappropriated. In other words, the recognition takes place in a reciprocal relation between the immigrant participants and the initiator artist. It also configures the knowledges about these immigration issues in conversations with the immigrants and their first-hand experience in day-to-day activities. As a result of the constraints placed upon forming political parties within non-profit organisations in the United States, *IM International* formed a community centre, which functions on compound levels, including as a think tank around issues related to immigration, offering free services to immigrants as a community centre, and criticising immigration policies through various representational activities.

Bruguera, herself a refugee, with growing concerns about the political representation and conditions facing immigrants, has been working on this project for the past half decade. The basic social ontology differentiates three overlapping 'phenomena' or 'spheres of phenomena', which "are arguably 'social' both in being somehow socially constituted and in participating in the constitution of the other elements of social reality"[60]: personhood, collectives, and institutions. Arguably, in contemporary analysis of social ontology,

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[58] Available at http://immigrant-movement.us/wordpress, accessed on 13 March 2014.
[59] May Day, also known as Labour Day, was chosen as the date for the International Workers' Day. The socialists, labour movement, anarchists, and communists promoted May Day as a celebration of labourers. It was also a celebration of the Second International, to commemorate the Haymarket affair which took place on 4 May 1886 in Chicago. Philip S., F, 1986, *May Day: A Short History of the International Workers' Holiday, 1886–1986,* New York: International Publishers, pp. 41–43.
[60] Ikaheimo, H., & Laitinen, A., 2011, ibid, p.3.

personhood is mostly studied as a distinct matter, while collectives and institutions tend to be discussed through their interconnectivity.

As suggested by Grant Kester while elaborating on Jean-Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community,* "Self-reflexive critique emerges as the only legitimate form of knowledge, providing basis for nonessentialist community"[61]. However, in the field of art and the context of our argument regarding curatorial practice in a self-reflexive manner, one could argue that personhood has been a point of departure for many practitioners. It is important to bear in mind that the ways in which recognition operates can be quite dynamic when dealing with each or some of these spheres. In other words, identification, acknowledgement, and recognition, as mentioned earlier, can be related in forming important elements of the processes of the recognition of the persons within the group.

Considering Bruguera's non-exhibitionary model more precisely, the representational mode is re-appropriated towards a different form of apprehension of power and knowledge. Here the representation of a sociopolitical issue is associated with the power of people represented by people, not the representation of power to people. Bruguera initially started a transnational political party for migrant people, with the aim of uniting immigrants and placing them in a position of power. Regardless of individual circumstances, places of origin, and places of refuge, in this way she acknowledged the commonalities existing amongst all immigrants.

Experiencing, distancing from, and reconfiguring the problematic of the émigré, Bruguera formulates her questions as an anarchistic move, in order to recognise and reproduce knowledges while changing the environment in which the immigrants are living. There are two points to be mentioned in relation to 'environmenting' as an ability to materialise such forms of reconfiguration and reproduction. Firstly, *IM International* recognises an existing issue and offers different ways through which this problematic could be interrupted. But more importantly, it acknowledges an unknown or disregarded part of society, one that struggles through the vulnerability originating in and resulting from political and social despair. In the next section the forms of collective with which 'environmenting' could be activated will be analysed further.

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[61] Kester, G. H., ibid, p. 160.

1.8.   (WHAT) FORM (of) A COLLECTIVE (?)

View of *International Migrants Day Parade*, December 18, 2011. Image courtesy of Tania Bruguera and the Queens Museum of Art, New York.

'*What does it mean to be a citizen of the world?* became a motivation for Bruguera to involve the local community in prearranged happenings and group actions through which they had to connect with immigrant and social service organisations. In the following section with respect to the ability of 'environmenting' *IM International* generates a possibility to rethink the problematic of immigration and by forming collective acts and conversational situations makes some alterations within and outside the community. Correspondingly, further questions to unpack are how to identify the everyday problems as an immigrant, how to trace their relations to social settings, and how to produce possibilities of co-appearances within them.

For instance, in one of the practices that took place on the number 7 subway platform at 111th Street in Corona, New York, Bruguera invited participants to strike up conversations with other passengers in a kind of Invisible Theatre[62]. They are asked to form performative

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[62] Developed in Buenos Aires, Invisible Theatre started as public and participatory action within public spaces such as restaurants while avoiding police authority by remaining normal as normal citizens who are about their daily acts. Augusto

strategies to talk about their experiences as an immigrant or as the child of an immigrant in America. Slightly different from the practices such as Invisible Theatre, Bruguera encourages the participants to share their experience of being part of an artist's group (*IM International*) with other passengers in the carriage. While doing so, they recite their thoughts on how it felt to take part in the May Day rally, for instance.

Such forms of representation suggest an altered mode of co-appearance and ways in which the production of knowledges becomes possible collectively. In this instance the question of representation not only is far away from the exhibitionary format as described in the previous section, but it also has been developed in the form of social activism that responds and engages with social realities directly. In other words, to regenerate forms of collectivity even further, we need to face a more complex challenge that is placed before us—to form new types of mutuality and establish new interactions between viewers and spaces outside of exhibitionary formats into the realm of everyday life.

Any act of recognition inherits an element of multiplicity, since it is concurrently giving recognition and gaining recognition. This makes the act of co-appearance an essential part of this mutuality. The power of recognisability in socially oriented forms of practice has to be simultaneously appreciated in mutual co-appearances. Yet it is important to know how to co-appear without this co-appearance being merely a means to the politics of representation. As explored earlier, a collective act settles alongside the notions of recognition and co-appearance in a mutuality of the two. Furthermore, it addresses the danger of becoming the subject of representation of a certain shared identity, while instead suggesting the staging of a co-appearance.

Moreover, to respond to the questions of who is defined as an immigrant and what values they share, Bruguera expands the field of her investigation into a study of the implementation of art in society by examining what it means to create "Useful Art."[63] By studying this historical break between, so to speak, the language of cultural practices and the language of critical politics, she imagines a way by which artistic practices could reproduce knowledges from different aspects of an issue as such. To reiterate, the ability to engage in 'environmenting' provides possibilities to think about our surroundings and rethink their forces by turning to them collectively. *IM International* does not form collectives that are bounded to the work of art as their focal point. Rather, it organises sets of collectives whose struggles take place in social modes of being in the world. With view to curatorial strategies

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Boal was the initiator of this practice in the early 1970s while in exile in Argentina when he wrote the first Invisible Theatre in collaboration with a group of actors.

[63] Initiated by Bruguera, *Arte Utile* or *Useful Art* states that art, when useful, must: 1. Propose new uses for art within society; 2. Challenge the field within which it operates (civic, legislative, pedagogical, scientific, economic, etc.); 3. Be 'timing specific', responding to current urgencies; 4. Be implemented and function in real situations; 5. Replace authors with initiators and spectators with users. 6. Have practical, beneficial outcomes for its users; 7. Pursue sustainability whilst adapting to changing conditions; 8. Re-establish aesthetics as a system of transformation. "The natural impulse of artists is trying to understand the things surrounding them and sharing with others the questions they make to themselves and the answers they find." Bruguera, T., 2012, *Reflexions on Arte Útil (Useful Art),* available at http://www.taniabruguera.com, accessed on 8 February 2013.

the generative and responsive modes of recognition suggest further concerns regarding the type of social environments produced by participatory practices.

The lack of a mutual relation between the viewers/participants and the work of art could propel a collective act in an absolute manner. Through such arrangements of the work of art, an extremely predetermined environment could shape the main object of occurrence, which, I argue, can block any possibility of interruption or mutual recognition in the practice of co-appearing. The formation of situations wherein the participants become part of an occurrence (the interchange of recognition and identification) can become one-directional, rather than producing a mutual structure.

I argue that the attitude of confronting the probability of the drift or the expansion of an event may produce passive viewers. By inserting a series of events into an environment, the likelihood of generating passive visitors as opposed to active participants could be increased. Through doing so, what is supposed to be a flow between the event and the environment, develops by inviting 'the people' to partake, in some instances can become a mode of producing two specific types of audience: one which desires a familiar account with which to play out a response one way or another, and one which stays silently spectating and hoping for an identification of any story. For instance, 'happenings' in *Calling* (1965) by Allan Kaprow seem to be primarily arranged and done by 'the people', who are retained at the performance as self-identified subjects. Happening in this way becomes an isolated representational gesture or action which is mostly exposed to people, rather than co-produced with them.

Kaprow, in 1961, wrote on the happenings in the New York scene, saying, "The most intense and essential happenings have been spawned in old lofts, basements, vacant stores, natural surroundings, and the street, where very small audiences, or group of visitors, are commingled in some way with the event, flowing in and among its parts."[64] This 'mingling' within the flow of the event could also be a useful way to address the practice of 'happening' (a name which referred to the spontaneity of the occurrence of the performance) for the participants in Kaprow's events. Happenings were defined and articulated as sets of events which were assembled and performed in various spaces and different times. He writes,

> "A Happening, unlike a stage play, may occur at a supermarket, driving along a highway, under a pile of rags, and in a friend's kitchen, either at once or sequentially. If sequentially, time may extend to more than a year. The Happening is performed according to plan but without rehearsal, audience, or repetition. It is art but seems closer to life."[65]

Kaprow's idea of happenings has certainly considered the concept of co-appearance within the public sphere and beyond the limits of exhibition spaces. However, the method of his practice fails to deliver such co-appearance and eventually presents an absolute form of

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[64] Kaprow, A., 1993, *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life,* Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, p. 1.
[65] Kaprow, A., 1966, *Some Recent Happenings*, New York: A Great Bear Pamphlet, p. 5.

audience. To some extent, the problem of representation creates a mode in which, I believe, the possibility of mutual recognition is strictly framed and therefore intentionally condensed down to a pure form of expression or representation. This raises issues around the formation of subjectivity under specific directions. In other words, the excessive power of the controllers forces people to a degree of performing recklessly. Nonetheless, other forms of reality are created within social environments, and collective acts take place, with the possibility of recognitions.

One of several projects by Kaprow under the umbrella of happenings is *Calling*, which was staged over two days in August 1965. It was an action performance split across two locations: New York City and George Segal's farm in South Brunswick, New Jersey. Participants were divided into two groups, of 'victims' and 'perpetrators.' The former group members were abducted several times throughout the first half of the work, and relocated to various landmarks around New York City by car. Once freed, these "human packages", as Kaprow called them, were asked to make a phone call to a number given to them beforehand.[66] They would eventually be relocated to yet another place, in the countryside of New Jersey. At this stage, in the woods, the victims strip the previous oppressors naked, as a symbolic gesture in which the loss of local certainty is replaced by the loss of decency. Nevertheless, it seems in the assemblages as such that a hidden controlling and governing mode is at play, which is built into the structures of their methods. The problem of the formation of a 'we' forces a sort of blind participation from the audience to carry out the predetermined 'act'.

Allan Kaprow, *Calling*, 1965, different sequences, image courtesy of Allan Kaprow, available at https://www.pinterest.co.uk/pin/37858453089792021/

Moreover, the way in which Kaprow inserts an unexpected scene into the everyday habits of life in public areas means that the common spaces of life become a stage for doings: a 'possibility' is activated. Yet the question is not only how one can 'compose' a possibility of making things happen; it is also about how to transform, rearrange, and collectively reproduce knowledges within those happenings. It is important to bear in mind that the

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[66] Kaprow, A., Winter, 1965, *Calling*, Source: *The Tulane Drama Review*, Vol. 10, No. 2, pp. 203-211, published by The MIT Press, available at http://www.jstor.org/stable/1125248, accessed on 29 March 2014.

'composition' of a happening, Kaprow suggests, "precedes exactly as in Assemblages and Environments", and that the collages of events take place within "certain spans of time and in certain spaces". Nevertheless, the composing as such is not a 'self-sufficient' formation of the people within those events or an organisation of activities by the people, but is rather imposed on them.

Almost a decade before *Calling*, in 1957, Kaprow, accompanied by George Brecht and John Cage, was a founding member of the Fluxus group. He produced a series of works called *Action Galleries*, which were focused on sound elements. This had become the focus of weekly encounters with John Cage, while Kaprow was auditing classes at the New School for Social Research. In continuation of a reciprocal practice between the two artists, Cage's weekly practice was answered by Kaprow's happenings. Eighteen acts were created, in six parts, and Kaprow presented them in the Reuben Gallery in New York in 1959. He arranged tightly planned events, where participants would act precisely as described in the programme given to them upon entering any of these events. This precision would be to such an extent that they were told to follow instructions on when to take a seat, when to move between spaces, and when applause was appropriate. It could be said that when a collective art is utterly prepared and/or fully produced beforehand, then is inserted into the society, it is a denial of the power of the audience.

These participatory events aimed to confuse the boundary between life and art through the notion of experience, but they in fact inserted a form of 'art' into 'life'. In other words, Kaprow's critical approach, which replaced the 'old abstract art' with forms of 'new concrete art,' in fact provided intriguing solutions to a fully participatory art. However, it remained constituted to a certain degree by the specified framework. Kaprow perceived that "the line between art and life should be kept as fluid, and perhaps as indistinct as possible."[67] Nonetheless, the problem of his practice, as solidly inserting and implementing pre-planned events into 'life', in a way made this line even clearer and bolder.

The changing nature of modern life and its communicative experiences was criticised by Kaprow in his interpretative relation of body and mind. *Calling* provided an experimental context for social and psychological interactions, which stipulated a framework of rational and narrative significations, in which participants inhabited temporal performances within which meaning could be made. Nonetheless, some of the textual material proposed by Kaprow dealt with the recognition of the possibility of staging other spaces of co-appearance. Whether through a literal gesture or an imaginary performative move, with a tendency not only to 'observe' but also to 'act', and in the context of our enquiry here, we can 'recognise' the possibilities of knowledge production established in his work. Kaprow writes this:

> "Imagine some evening when one has sat talking with friends, how as the
> conversation became reflective the pace slowed, pauses became longer, and the

[67] Ibid.

speaker 'felt' not only heavier but their distance from one another increased proportionally, as though each were surrounded by great areas commensurate with voyaging of his mind. Time retarded as space extended. Suddenly, from out on the street, through the open window a police car, siren whining, was heard speeding by, its space moving as the source of sound moved from somewhere to the right of the window to somewhere farther to the left. Yet it also came spilling into the slowly spreading vastness of talkers' space, invading the transformed room, partly shattering it, sliding shockingly in and about its envelope, nearly displacing it. And as in those cases where sirens are only sounded at crowded street corners to warn pedestrians, the police car and its noise at once ceased and the capsule of time and space it had become vanished as abruptly as it made itself felt. Once more the protracted picking of one's way through the extended reaches of mind resumed as the group of friends continued speaking."[68]

If the principles of how to articulate a project for Kaprow had to be found in artlessness and practicality, with fluidity between the happenings and daily life, this was certainly the same for Bruguera. However, these principles expanded, in Bruguera's practice, to have a proposed new use in society. Created as art, still entering other disciplines and domains, so the proposal is utopian, not only in the mind but also in its reality and actuality. To be more specific, for Bruguera such activities must be responding to urgent issues, to already existing conflicts and struggles. As such problems change constantly, practice also changes and, as a result, becomes conditional. Practice is enabled to announce new possibilities and operate not just in active participation but in productive collaboration.

Taking this as a point of return to my discussion of curatorial methods, a slightly different standpoint is essential to understand the relationship between Bruguera and Kaprow's works. It relates to spaces of representation by means of not only activating possibilities by which mutual recognition could occur amongst the participants but also by representing the form of re-inhabiting the common that belongs to the participants. In other words, it represents a method to intervene into 'existing' structures of the common, to recognise the problematics and possibilities, such as immigrants in a new neighbourhood, and to engage in different conversational forms.

As mentioned earlier, enabling possibilities of collective recognition must be gained through the practice of reciprocal processes and mutual co-appearance. Allowing for the reconfiguration of the ruins of the existing compositions contains a significant potential to create possibilities for co-appearance. This slight alteration expands a new horizon, by which it moves away from isolated, bounded, and authorised activities, and begins to transfer and re-appropriate environments differently. Hence, we can see how the expansion of boundaries and the alteration of shared spaces can become possible.

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[68] Kaprow, A., 1966, *Assemblage, Environments and Happenings* in *Chance* (Whitechapel: Documents of Contemporary Art), Iversen, M., ed., 2010, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press. Originally published in Kaprow, A., *Assemblage, Environment and Happenings*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, pp. 52-57.

1.9. Conclusion

Left: *Immigrant Movement International* participated in December 18 International Migrants Day of Artist Actions, New York City. Right: Installation view of *First Papers of Surrealism* exhibition, 1942.

Throughout this chapter, the ability of 'environmenting' has been traced in exhibitionary and non-exhibitionary formats as a curatorial potential. In the early examples I analysed how the foundation for this mode of operation was formed through the 'withdrawal' of the artist and/or the artworks from the state of exhibition. Furthermore, the impact of such loss on spaces surrounding the art community was explored on a positive account. By rethinking the forces of exhibitionary formats, as discussed in the presented practices, i.e., the *First Papers of Surrealism* and *The Void*, a kind of alteration in the collective appearance of the audience was created through such withdrawals. Consequently, these alterations developed into collective participation of the 'audience' in socially engaged practices, i.e., *IM International*. In such cases, as argued, neither the artist nor the artwork is 'withdrawn' from the site of the artistic practice, but the former is turned into an initiator while the latter is expanded onto the whole project itself. Moreover, I demonstrated how in such environments, new sets of components can create possibilities for mutual recognition and reciprocal edification.

Through analysing various forms of artistic practices, I argued that 'environmenting' is a 'curatorial-ability', which creates probabilities for recognising new spaces and different positions for collective acts within the exhibitionary and non-exhibitionary formats. The social interactions that are normally made possible within curated practices are built around the relation between art object and audience as passive or interactive viewers. Rogoff, in "We-Collectives, Mutualities, Participations" writes,

> "Despite the prevailing methodologies that continue to link the experience of art to individual reflection, we do look at art, inhabit the spaces of art in various forms of

collectivity and in the process we produce new forms of mutuality, of relations between viewers and spaces rather than relations between viewers and objects."[69]

To regenerate forms of collectivity, we need to face a more complex challenge that is placed before us. To form new types of mutuality and establish new interactions between viewers and spaces, we need to alter the relation within the exhibitionary formats and look into the social settings outside display. Such creative accounts, whether produced by curators or artists, in rearranging the environments and critically generating collective operations within them contain a new approach to the curatorial potentials.

In view of new forms of mutuality that are produced by rearranging relationships among the artists, audience, and spaces of art to form the composition of new environments in a curatorial manner, we find a mode of displacement in both Kaprow's and Bruguera's practices. By inserting a whole new set of acts in the form of events within existing structures, for example the wrapped-up bodies in a train station as one of the sites for *Calling*, Kaprow envisages certain acts, plans the emergence of a happening, and redefines the positionality of the active participants as well as the passive audience. In such a scenario everyone is open to be a participant and everybody in the station could be an audience.

Conversely, Bruguera creates a much more complex environment. For instance, she initially organises a series of dialogical encounters among the participants for shared individual experiences by planting workshops or open discussions at the headquarters of *IM International*. Then she grows the practice to organise conversational encounters between the participants and the public at a train station and inside the carriages to expand individual experiences on to collective knowledges. By replacing the author with an initiator and the audience with productive participants, she makes possible a different way of mutuality, which requires a process of recognisability. In other words, the initiator identifies an existing problematic and provides a collective operation within it. This is generated to an extent by which participants not only can inhabit the domain of public differently but also can from new 'mutualities' in it.

Correspondingly, the replacement of the active audience with the productive participants generates an additional potentiality: committed involvement. Thus, to maintain a mutual recognisability to endure 'commoning' requires a pertinent task of 'environmenting'. *IM International* provides possibilities of recognising an existing problematic of a community with the community, and it hopes for the transformation of an operational system that has positive effects on the condition of that community. Such forms of art practice, in various contexts, can provide a different understanding of the art community, the community of artists, and community-based art.

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[69] Rogoff, I., 2004, "We-Collectives, Mutualities, Participations", available at http://theater.kein.org/node/95, accessed on December 2013.

Indeed, moving beyond exhibitionary modes has provided vast ground for socially oriented practices within the art world. However, the struggles with the intricate state of exhibition and representation of art as well as the complexities of non-exhibitionary practices must be reconsidered in the ways in which the domain of art and its community is shaped and recognised. In this regard and as discussed above, curatorial potentials traceable through such practices could enable different mutualities and form new spaces to encounter art in a more critical manner within our contemporary condition. On that note, the pursuit of sustainability or adaption to a changing condition must take place not by means of a short-term practice, but rather as an ongoing commitment to a community, which has a long-term life.[70] In relation to the imperative of time, in the next chapter I will explore another ability of curatorial practice: 'improvising'.

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[70] Bruguera, T., 23 August 2013, *Lunch Talk* at Alte Saline Hallein, available at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0f2NFVd17M, accessed on December 2013.

CHAPTER 2: IMPROVISING

2.1. Introduction

> In the usual order of things, lives run their course like rivers.... As a result of serious trauma, or sometimes for no reason at all, the path splits and a new, unprecedented persona comes to live with the former person, and eventually takes up all the room. An unrecognisable persona whose present comes from no past, whose future harbours nothing to come, an absolute existential improvisation.[71]
>
> Catherine Malabou
> *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*

Various platforms on which curatorial projects are represented and/or exhibited shape the possibilities for the encounter between art and audience in certain time frames and within designated spaces. Ellen Blumenstein, in reference to Jacques Derrida's *Artaud the Moma*, highlights the transfer of the ideas on theatre to the museums and their function today. Considering the complexities of different capacities within the art field, such as the roles of artwork, artist, as well as curators and the audience, she emphasises the developing ideas for a new understanding of the museum's place in society.[72] She writes:

> "The curator inevitably acts as a symptom of an institution, representing what the organisation wants from the inside, but is also addressed from the outside as the one who is able to fulfil any kind of wish or demand. Thus, she is like a doorkeeper who makes sure the house is open and accessible, but also controls who comes in and which role is assigned to each person."[73]

How should we understand improvisation as an act and a method of operation from a curatorial perspective to shape alternative places for art in society? What is the relationship between time–space and curatorial practice? What does it mean to be subject to one's own act within a common domain and out of time? What is improvisation in relation to curating, and to/with whom and about what can one improvise? To allow the realisation of improvisation as a way of preforming, I would like first to deepen my field of investigation of performative quality of improvising with a view to its relevance to curatorial practice. To do so, I study a playwright that investigates such quality of improvisation within the place of

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[71] Malabou, C. 2012, *Ontology of the Accident; An Essay on Destructive Plasticity.* C. Shread, trans. UK: Polity Press.
[72] Blumenstein, E. "The Curator and Her Double. The Cruelty of the Avatar", Available at: http://www.on-curating.org/issue-26-reader/the-curator-and-her-double-the-cruelty-of-the-avatar.html#edn5
[73] Ibid.

theatre: *Tonight, We Improvise: A Drama in Three Acts*, written in 1930 by Luigi Pirandello (1867–1936, Italy). The play begins with a conflict, moves through a confusion between love and pain, and concludes in a novel configuration of death and theatre, while improvisation is used as a method in response to such change of events.

I will explore the above questions through sets of patterns that run parallel, but which nonetheless crisscross repeatedly. Pirandello's *Tonight, We Improvise* offers the possibility of a collective operation beyond the conventional theatrical forms and contextualises the notion of improvisation at the edge of life and death. The withdrawal of the author from the theatre challenges the performers to use an improvisational method. A destructive situation caused by the lack of a script forces the director and the performers to be responsible for their own act. This happens to the extent to which the audience also takes part in the act, while the actors are encouraged to continue their play outside the main auditorium during the interval.

In *Tonight, We Improvise*, Pirandello studies the theatre on the verge of its shift to a new form by providing possibilities to imagine how a destructive experience could render visible new potentialities. From etymological analysis, the act of improvising, relating to musical improvisation (1786) from French improvisation or improvisor, means "compose or say extemporaneously" (17c.) from Italian *improvisare*, which means "to sign or speak extempore", and from Latin *improviso*, which means "unforeseen; not prepared beforehand". The Latin phrase ex tempore "offhand, in accordance with (the needs of) the moment", means "out of time", or as an adjective and noun, it means "without notes" (1630s).[74] As an act that is to compose, say, or do something with no preparation and offhand, a certain level of prior knowledge seems pertinent for someone to improvise. Thus, it could be said that improvisation is a generative process from knowledge to action that could resonate with the notion of experiment or experience and then become readable in its relation to sustaining and survival.

In the second part of this chapter, I will investigate the capacity to improvise in the contemporary field of art and within curatorial strategies. I explore and analyse a multilayered work by artists Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri. I focus particularly on their complex project *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply, Just Making Art*, and *London Common(s)* which, as parts of a larger project titled *Commoning Times*, took place at numerous locations in London between February and March 2014. The possible occurrences of different modalities developed in response to states of exigency are explored in this project. 'Improvising' is to generate possibilities to perform in an exigency of time with or without skills and knowledges, both individually and collectively. In their project, Anastas and Gabri create possibilities for experiencing such exigency, both individually and collectively.

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[74] Harper, D., 2010, Online *Etymology Dictionary* & *Collins English Dictionary, Complete & Unabridged 2012 Digital Edition*, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986, available at: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/improvisation

From one perspective, their practice interrupts the conjuncture of exhibition, research, performance, films, and talks. From another perspective, it runs parallel with a sister project initiated at the 16 Beaver Street in New York City, titled *Commoning the City and Withdrawing from the Community of Money*, in which the common has been approached not just as a concept, but also as a practice improvised through various queries. For instance, "why is every facet of life and in equal force, our relations with others, becoming monetised or dictated by money or some form of promissory note, credit, debt, capital...?"[75] Through improvisation, everyday practices, and social relations, they explore the ways in which the forces of money and capital can be altered, resisted, and disrupted.

Through analysis of these two case studies, this chapter aims to expand on improvisation in its genuine characteristic of creative practice of knowledge and action, while investigating the possibility of individual and collective authorship. In both case studies, the position of the author, "the director" in Pirandello's play and the "artist" in Anastas and Gabris' project, has been expanded through the ability to improvise.

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[75] *A Common(s) Course: Commoning the City & Withdrawing from the Community of Money*, with David Harvey, Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis, 16 Beaver Group, December 2016. Available at http://16beavergroup.org/common/#WEEKTOWEEK.

2.2. Tonight, We Improvise: from Background to Foreground

On 25 January 1930, Luigi Pirandello, for the first time, brought his play *Tonight, We Improvise, A Drama in Three Acts*, to the stage in Königsberg (Kaliningrad), then a German enclave between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea, which is today part of Russia. He had moved to Berlin in 1928, where the play was completed a few months later, as a kind of chosen exile, after the financial support of Teatro d'Arte was cut by Mussolini's government. The original title is *Questa Sera Si Recita a Soggetto* which, as part of Pirandello's *Theatre Within the Theatre* trilogy, has been translated into English at least three times, each time under the title *Tonight, We Improvise*.[76]

The original text was published in 1910 in *Corriere della Sera* (an Italian daily newspaper established in 1876), as, so to speak, a response to the new possibilities, such as orchestrated dialogues or talking pictures, that were emerging in the field of theatre. It could be said that it was a confrontation with the articulation of time and duration in theatre, while recognising a sense of difference and new becoming. Although the theatrical gesture of talkies in cinema was to some degree problematic, it created a new possibility resulting in reconfiguration of the cinematicity within theatre.

Pirandello's brief stay in Berlin while working on the play coincided with a critical shift in the German theatre in a period of relative stability for the Weimar Republic.[77] "The intangible equipment of well-ordered life" and the "golden era", before being disturbed by Nazis, expands the notion of the culture as a social act.[78] Theatre and its ability to inhabit the new social forces, therefore, produce a new set of practices and reintroduces the role of the director as a crucial agent.

Pirandello's criticism of theatre towards the end of his career is significant considering the fact that he worked and studied theatre and its structure intensively and extensively, both as playwright and director, for decades. He explores the question of authorship and its relation to the role of director and playwright in his trilogy and other works, which seem to be part of a self-reflexive practice. It implies that his criticism, both of the condition of aesthetic experience in theatre and the question of authorship, is reflected upon in this last series of

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[76] *Tonight, We Improvise* was translated into English for the first time in 1932 by Samuel Putnam, then in 1959 by Marta Abba, and eventually in 1987 by J. Douglas Campbell and Leonard Sbrocchi.

[77] The Weimar democracy established in 1919 in Germany refers to Weimar city wherein the constitutional assembly took place. Kaes, A., Jay, M., Dimendberg, E., eds. 1994, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, pp. 35–36.

[78] John Willett suggests this interpretation for the German term *Bildung* that was particularly used within the conscious attitudes of the time in theatre and the arts and their key roles in social improvement. Willett, J. 1998, *The Theatre of the Weimar Republic*. Holmes & Meier.

his work. Questions such as "was it the director's task to reproduce what the writer had written, and/or was it to produce a work of art inspired by the writer's text?"[79], which are parts of his playwrights showing the effect of this line of thought in his work. Interrogating the role of the author in relation to concepts of "production" and "reproduction" of subjectivity becomes an apparent interest in Pirandello's practice.

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[79] Dashwood, J., ed. 1996, *Luigi Pirandello The Theatre of Paradox*, The Edwin Mellen Press, p. 268

2.3. A Positive Destruction or the Moment of Improvisation

Scene from *Tonight, We Improvise*, performed by Sock and Buskin, 27 February to 2 March 1963; directed by David F. Unumb. Sock and Buskin, Brown University's Library collection.

Tonight, We Improvise is a rebellious drama initiated in darkness, failure, confusion, and destruction. The lights in the auditorium go out, yet the curtains do not move as expected to open the show. After a little while, it becomes apparent that there is a dispute on stage, behind the closed curtains among the performers. The debate spreads among the audience because of the delay. Ultimately, the Director is on stage trying to calm the crowd and claiming that the play has already begun exactly as it was planned. He begins the introductory speech by announcing his decision to eliminate the author from the play.

> "I have–eliminated him [says the Director, Dr Hinkfuss]. His name doesn't figure even
> on the posters. But then it would hardly have been fair of me to have made him
> responsible ever so slightly for this evening's performance. The only individual
> responsible for this evening is myself. I have taken one of his stories as I would have

taken one by anyone else. I preferred to take one of his because, of all writers writing for the theatre, it is perhaps he alone who has shown himself fully aware of the fact that the work of a writer is finished the moment he has finished putting the last word down on paper. He is responsible for the work to the readers of course, and to book reviewers, but neither can nor should be, to theatregoers and to drama critics, who pass judgement sitting in a theatre."[80]

An end causes destruction at the start of the play. The audience can hear the arguments among the players even though the curtains are closed and players are not visible to the audience. With the Director's announcement to the audience, they become aware not only of the disturbing news – the loss of the author – but also, they learn of their responsibility to act upon it. It becomes the responsibility of director and the players to improvise without script. The unprecedented condition raises the issue of how to deal with this unusual situation and form it anew. The death of the author, or the elimination of the writer, marks the point at which improvisation becomes the only method of operation. *Tonight, We Improvise* performs the ability of improvising as a way of doing and a new form of theatre. The Director, players, and the audience act upon the disrupted moment by improvising collectively. Although, the Director has created, in a way, the disruption by removing the writer, he recognises that the writer, too, is the one who has shown himself of being fully aware of the matter. "… he has shown himself fully aware of the fact that the work of a writer is finished the moment he has finished putting the last word down on paper"[81]. The Director also recognises the fact that the audience are indeed in the position of being responsible for the work and the act of improvising.

Almost immediately after the revelation of the eliminated author, a liberational move positions a different engagement with the play while unfolding to a new form. It is important to mention that the question of audience and judgement is raised at the very beginning of the play and even before the performers and author. It is clearly announced by the Director that, with the removal of the author, it now is the responsibility of the Director and the Audience as well as the players to survive the evening, and so the disrupted scene moves towards a mode of collective exigency.

The change of position between the audience and the players seems to be a productive change in the sense that a new role is taken up by the audience. In other words, the audience in Pirandello's play express their opinion as part of the act as the play moves on. They take part in the formation of the situation in a twofold position: audience–performers. The same process of transformation keeps taking place even outside the theatre, inside the corridor, and in the interlude.

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[80] Pirandello, L. 1988, *Tonight We Improvise, A Drama in Three Acts*. M. Abba, trans. Revised and re-written by Marta Abba. London: Samuel French, p. 11.
[81] Ibid.

"If a work of art survives, it is only because we can still lift it out of the rigidity of its own form and let it loose inside ourselves, with our own life endow it with life differently at different times for each of us."[82]

Different forms of interruptions, practised and theorised by the Epic Theatre movement in the early 20th century, created a distance to emphasise the audience's perspective towards the theatre as a response to the political climate. Such distance was stated by Bertolt Brecht as the "defamiliarisation effect", which was practised through various methods such as addressing the audience directly during the play, using songs as interruptions, explanatory cards, and reading directions out loud on stage.[83]

Although, Brecht's idea of distancing the audience from the alluring effect of theatre as a development of a new aesthetic was a pertinent reflection on the political condition, Pirandello's contribution to the Epic Theatre offers a further perspective. His use of improvisation as a collective practice not only "defamiliarises" the audience from the captivative effects of theatre, but also engages the artists/players with unfamiliar routines. By doing so, a kind of non-authorship experience was made possible in the theatre. In *Tonight, We Improvise*, both the author and the directors are removed from the stage, and players and audience become subject to their own acts. The question of authorship in this case expands onto the possibilities of multiple authors or non-authorship.

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[82] Ibid, p. 13.
[83] Bertolt, B., 1964, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury. p. 138.

2.4. Invisible Destruction Theatre/Life

Tonight, We Improvise, Act I. Photographed by Charles Rotmil.
Performed at the Living Theatre, a William S. Burroughs Community, 1960.

After the lack of a script is announced by the Director, the curtain goes up, and the performers register their discomfort and dissatisfaction with the Director and his plan of not handing them a proper play to perform. In an almost imperceptible move, the tale begins with the relationship between the La Croce family and a group of Italian officers, who are spending their spare time at this family home.

The family is made up of six members: Signor Palmiro who is a mining engineer and is famous for his habit of whistling absent-mindedly; Signora Ignazia who is known as The General; and their four daughters, Mommina, Totina, Dorina, and Nene. Yet, through their argument over the loss of the script, later on their "real" name is revealed to the audience. The leading actor Ricco Verri – one of the officers visiting don Palmiro – expresses his passion for the true theatre once the Director calls him by his "real" name. Ricco Verii replies to the Director:

> "Mr... (he says his own name) no longer exist. He has given his word to improvise this evening, and to do so, to have on his lips those lines that must rise from the depths of the character he represents, with the action that goes with them, with all the gesture completely natural, Mr... must live the character of Rico Verri. And is already."[84]

The disorder that has been created on the stage triggers the players to emphasise the boundary between art and life from a personal perspective. For Ricco, the true act is to dive into the character so deeply that the real persona doesn't exist. On the contrary, the Director

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[84] Pirandello, Ibid, p. 14.

disagrees with such a performance. He believes the true act moves from the "divine solitude world of the work of art [theatre] into the reachable state of the world of life through improvisation".[85] It is with the condition of the collaborative act that such boundaries between art and life are removed. Improvisation has been explored by Pirandello as a method that encourages the audience and the players/artists to act introspectively upon a particular moment on stage. This moment mostly emerges from a precarious situation. The challenges of improvisation for the players begin when they arrive at the moment of free choice.

It appears that Dr Hinkfuss' attempt at describing the relation between life and a work of art is to think creativity as animating ability that could be approached through the collective act of improvvisare. Pirandello's attempt to liberate the self from the "solitude world of art" and "theatre" is a search for the potentiality of a collective social process. This potential of searching for a different "life" in "theatre" becomes even more apparent in his play *Six Characters in Search for an Author* (1921). A part of his Trilogy of the *Theatre in the Theatre*[86], this play deals directly with the issue as its main challenge.

In this play, a group of actors and actresses claim to be live and real characters, seeking an author to represent their pain. The six characters recognise the problem of identifying a form of life within the "artistic" form of theatre. At the beginning of the play, when the six characters appear on the stage attending a meeting with the Manager, who is in the middle of filming with a large crew, the conversation between the Manager and the Father reads as follow.

> "The Manager.
> Very well, – but where does all this take us?
>
> The Father. Nowhere! It is merely to show you that one is born to life in many forms, in many shapes, as tree, or as stone, as water, as butterfly, or as woman. So, one may also be born a character in a play.
> The Manager [with feigned comic dismay]. So, you and these other friends of yours have been born characters?
> The Father. Exactly, and alive as you see!"[87]

In *Tonight, We Improvise*, the ghostly presence of Pirandello, the writer, contextualises the scenes as the act of 'improvising' generates a move between knowledge and creation. Although he withdraws himself – the writer/author – from the actual play, he leaves invisible traces. The actual written text of the play, besides the acted production, offers even more

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[85] Ibid.

[86] This trilogy includes the following plays: *Six Characters in Search of an Author (Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore), Each in His Own Way (Ciascuno a suo modo), and Tonight We Improvise (Questa sera si recita a soggetto),* first published in 1921, 1924, and 1930 respectively.

[87] Pirandello, L. 1922, "Six Characters in Search of an Author", (Sei personaggi in cerca d'autore), *A Comedy in the Making*, Storer, E., trans. New York: E.P. Dutton.

multilayered complexity. This complexity unfolds simultaneously between the play, the audience, the performers, and the writer, who is un-presently present at all time.

All of the characters are cooperating in a twofold mode that is set in an unrehearsed way. On one hand, there is a play, which starts and finishes before the eyes of the audience, in front of the closed curtains, on the stage settings, and in the lobby during the interval, expanding itself beyond the boundary of theatre and intending to actualise itself by attaining "life". On the other hand, a drama takes place only in the designed scenes on the stage, performing the story of La Croce, a notorious family, who have emigrated from Naples to a conservative Sicilian neighbourhood, and face the ups and downs of love, pain, and death. From the beginning to the end, the whole play tries to accomplish itself in place between "theatre" and "life". Correspondingly, there are audiences, performers, and the writer of the "theatre", and those of the live act who operate within this complexity.

In *Tonight, We Improvise*, the line between "life" and "theatre" is also represented by a clandestineness between the play's text and the presentation of the text. The performativity embedded in the text of *Tonight, We Improvise* is a grounded potential that is still never fully exhausted in the play. The written structure of the text proposes different sections to be improvised by the players. Hitherto an unforeseeable act, improvisation could never be fully anticipated. Pirandello's theatre has a great deal of respect for such potentiality and constantly moves from one side of the line to the other – from theatre to life and back. This is practised through the possibility of not fully performing the "theatre" character, for instance Rico Verii, nor completely playing the person in "life" – Mr___.

The play unfolds while the performers grapple with the question of how to differentiate their true selves, which can only be known by themselves, from their roles that are to be known by the audience. This confusion is emphasised by a set of exchanges between Dr Hinkfuss and the actors discussing the format of their improvised acts. A constant repositioning between "life" and "theatre" occurs because of such reconfigurations.

The actors and actresses know the concept of their play and their circumstances. And by their constant struggle with the discomfort of being put out of their norm, a displacement between the "life" and "theatre" keeps reviving the mode of improvising. Dr Hinkfuss assures them on various occasions that, because of the lack of organisation, what seems to be a messy situation flows as it is planned. However, this is not precisely what theatre is supposed to do in the way in which it dramatises the motivations and actions through spiritual drives. Quite the opposite, Pirandello alters the rules of the game and displaces them in an unfamiliar and, largely, an uncomfortable zone.

The encounter with such a zone, on occasion, becomes singular. For instance, when one of the actresses justifies her violent act towards another actor as she improvises, she says "My slap was just a perfectly instinctive gesture. "I haven't a written part to play. My lines come

from here (she makes a gesture from the stomach up)"[88]. Although the individual moves are strongly accentuated, the improvised parts are mainly collective exercises. To put it differently, the whole drama happens within a cooperative mode of improvising.

Taking jazz performance as a prominent example of improvisational creativity, Howard S. Becker writes about the Etiquette of Improvisation as a collective social knowledge. He writes that everyone in the jazz collective improvisation needs to pay close attention to others and be prepared to change direction at the right time when a response is required. To do so, an understanding and awareness at almost every moment from almost everyone involved in the improvisation is needed.

> "The etiquette here is more subtle … because everyone understands that at every moment everyone (or almost everyone) involved in the improvisation is offering suggestions as to what might be done next, in the form of tentative moves, slight variations that go one way rather than some of the other possible ways."[89]

The constant move between "life" and "theatre" in *Tonight, We Improvise* generates a contingent space within which improvised acts constantly reach the verge of actualisation. In other words, yet another level of reality is produced through a move between visibility and invisibility, real and fiction, as well as knowledge and non-knowledge. Hence, the act of 'improvising' is a generative move that displaces from a pre-existing condition without being fully exhausted in the act. Furthermore, 'improvising' is neither a chaotic nor an organised mode; it is a combination of both, a deformed form. Insofar as the 'improvising' act cannot forecast its future form(s), it activates an ability of the act of formation itself and hangs on to the potential of transformation as it never enduringly resides in any resulting form.

'Improvising' in this sense provides a possibility for the fabrication of different forms of "life" and "theatre". It is a mode of survival operating within a different logic of time and space. It does not fully cause the performers to fall into the character that they are performing in "theatre", nor is it determined by the persons they are in "life", but it combines the two, as theatre/life characters. Therefore, 'improvising' creates an exigency to articulate a different state of time, yet nonetheless adheres to the usual flow of time.

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[88] Pirandello, L. 1988, p.18.
[89] Becker, H.S. 2000, "The Etiquette of Improvisation", in *Mind, Culture, Activity*, 7(3), pp. 171–176, available at: http://howardsbecker.com/articles/improv.html

2.5. Modal Improvisation of a Time to Come

Extemporaneous composition, or free performance, as a crucial characteristic of 'improvising', has been studied mostly in the fields of music and performance. When used on a musical passage, it has often been approached in a manner conforming to specific technical and stylistic norms, free from the features of a text score. For instance, Fred Moten analyses the jazz improvisation on Miles Davis's "So What", from the album *Kind of Blue* (1959), while emphasising his striking capabilities in modal improvisation. The free relation of music to itself is explained as a paradoxical structure in the jazz improvisation of the song that has a multiple, decentred structure. Moten writes:

> "So What" (1959) marks the full emergence of the era of modal improvisation in jazz and is considered "the modal composition par excellence," the bridge linking and separating the severe structures of bebop's harmonically based improvisational model to the more melodic, even anarchic recognition of or improvisations through the song from itself that the music known as free jazz enacts.[90]

The act of 'improvising' is distinct from the notion of performance, whether playing an instrument or acting in a scenario. Performing without a script, for example, as a free jazz saxophonist does, requires a particular degree of skill. However, more importantly in relation to the concern of this chapter, is the potential act or movement from knowledge to performance. "Improvisation", writes Moten, "is located at a seemingly unbridgeable chasm between feeling and reflection, disarmament and preparation, speech and writing".[91] Improvisation, although thought of as "pure freedom", is indeed a response to an exigency: a feeling of a necessary act in the hope of true reflection.

From Latin *improviso* means "unforeseen; not prepared beforehand"; however, to any possible approach of representation, there always intrinsically belongs a kind of prediction.[92] This prediction is either made possible through simultaneous experience or based on learned knowledge and skill. Henceforth, improvisation holds a self-contradictory element that is temporal. The temporal relationship found within improvisation is how one is able to see the obscurity of the present. Giorgio Agamben, in his essay "What is the

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[90] Moten, F. 2003, *In the Break, The Aesthetic of the Black Radical Tradition.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, p. 100.
[91] Ibid, p. 63.
[92] Collins English Dictionary, Complete & Unabridged, 2012, Digital Edition, William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd. 1979, 1986, available at: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/improvisation

Contemporary?", describes a bodily knowledge of the "off-cells" and the ability to perceive what comes towards the one who sees it. Agamben writes:

> "The contemporary is the person who perceives the darkness of his time as something that concerns him, as something that never ceases to engage him. Darkness is something that—more than any light—turns directly and singularly toward him. The contemporary is the one whose eyes are struck by the beam of darkness that comes from his own time."[93]

In view to temporal dimension of improvisation, the act of 'improvising' is not utterly unprepared about what lies ahead, nor is it about what could be predicted or determined. Quite the opposite, the act of improvising is the opening of a time to come. Thus, it looks into the future not as a determined entity, but as a different articulation of time. Concerned with the questions of time and representation revolving around the work of Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, in the following section, I explore the contemporaneous in their practice specifically in relation to their methodologies. Also, the ways in which their approach unfolds through certain qualities of time and undertakes improvisational methods helped me to unpack an ability of curatorial that I call 'improvising'. Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri's practice points to rendering a future to "open up a horizon of the common(s)",[94] improvised through various queries and different forms of collective presentations.

Correspondingly, studying "common(s)" in terms of the spatial dimension in Anastas and Gabri's work is made possible through the number of events organised at various places. Nonetheless, the temporal dimension of thinking about the "common(s)" and delivering the practices of "communing" turn into the most challenging aspect of their work. As they state, "Thinking together the common(s) through a temporal lens can open to practices and processes which translate the experience of life, as one that only has meaning when it is being-with or becoming-with".[95]

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[93] Agamben, G. 2009, "What is the Contemporary?", in *What is an Apparatus? And Other Essays,* Kishik, D. & Pedatella,S., trans. California: Stanford University Press, p. 45.
[94] Anastas, A., Gabri, R., *Commoning Times Berlin,* available at: http://commoningtimes.org/texts/notes_on_a_c_f_a_d.pdf, accessed on: 13 May 2014.
[95] Ibid

2.6. Commoning Times

Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, 2014; left: *The Walls Within*; right: *Money Is Dead.*

Disconnection from chronological time (ex-temporising) in this study indicates a condition both for the emergence of a different state of time, and for the possibilities of different modalities within such an exigency: exigency through a sense of a necessary act in the hope of a true reflection of its own condition. In this section, I explore how possibilities for collective modalities are created through 'improvising' via different curatorial methods. On the one hand, I explore disconnecting from the flow of time as a rupture or a leap within an artistic practice that opens up new modalities between the artists and the audience. On the other hand, I focus on how sharing time generates the capacity to measure up to different forms of collective exigency between the artists, audience, and the art institutions.

By analysing the complex practice of the artists Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, I study how 'improvising' is engaged as an ability to revisit the relation between artist and audience as well as artist and art-field. In this regard, the methods developed through their practice suggest strong connections with the ability to improvise. The generative qualities of improvisation in this practice deal with disrupted times to create a ground between the current time and the time to come. In other words, the ability of 'improvising' is developed through a set of questions about current conditions and everyday life in which common has been suggested not just as a concept to think about, but also as a practice.

Their time-based project *Commoning Times* is a collaborative carried out over two years and in various cities; Venice, Vienna, Stockholm, Utrecht, London, New York, Berlin, and Kassel. For this study, I focus my research on a particular section of their work that took place between February and March 2014 in London. At the time, they exhibited a research-based

project at The Showroom[96] titled *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply Just Making Art*. The exhibition included a series of performances, a *Continuous Film* that changed daily, as well as a selection of videos and texts that were produced throughout numerous talks and conversations prior to and during the show. Both *Commoning Times* and *Let It Not Be Said…* as multilayered and research-based practices contained a series of events that were organised collectively between the audience and the artists, and took place in collaboration with various institutions in London including The Common House,[97] Delfina Foundation,[98] The Field,[99] MayDay Rooms,[100] and No.W.Here.[101]

The artists' disapproval of conventional forms of representation in art leads them to produce multilayered arrangements of artistic practices while using curatorial methodologies. With the aim of entering another phase of time in the process of creating their art, Anastas and Gabri, on one side, turn the space of exhibition into their studio, and on the other side, expand their conversational pieces on the notion of "common" onto various art spaces across the city. For instance, they introduced the element of continuity into their practice by projecting a live video screening of an audio-visual performance on the ground floor of The Showroom while they were performing on the top floor with improvised scenarios at each public presentation. Furthermore, they organised the *London Common(s) Course*, offering debates about the main question of their practice that of "common" at different art spaces in order to

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[96] The Showroom founded in 1983, is a non-commercial space for contemporary art. They focus on collaborative and process-driven projects in various forms of exhibition, discussions, screenings, publications, knowledge, and relations. The Showroom receives funds from sponsors, donations and crowed funding as well as hiring out the space to art-affiliated events. This is done in order to support artists and other practitioners via major and smaller commissions often introducing international artists to the London scene. Further information is available at: http://www.theshowroom.org, Accessed on: 8 March 2014.

[97] The Common House, established in 2013, is an artist-run space that organises workshops and projects in order to sustain its being and share struggles around the notion of common(s). Through various projects, they aim to develop an understanding of the common(s) and how to manage, share, and reproduce resources. Available at: http://www.commonhouse.org.uk/about-2/, accessed 25 November, 2015.

[98] Delfina Foundation was founded in 2007 to promote artistic exchange and experimentation via residency programmes. They have commissioned artists from North Africa, the Middle East, and South America to create opportunities for emerging and established artists, curators, and writers in London. Delfina Foundation hosted Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri while they were working on the *Commoning Times* in London. http://delfinafoundation.com/about/mission/, accessed on 12 March 2014.

[99] The Field was founded in February 2014. Their aim is to collectively create and sustain a neighbourhood resource and a culture of the Commons in New Cross Road located in the Southeast of London. The Field have organised various projects together with local practitioners from various backgrounds, in order to learn and share knowledges locally. The project was opened up by inviting people from the local neighbourhood to take part in the refurbishment of the building, which housed The Field, while learning skills from one another. The Field continues to run workshops in this form of skill sharing, teaching something for free and learning something else for free as well. In doing so, they have managed to generate a small income for sustaining of the project while re-configuring various knowledges around their practice and throughout collaborative exchanges. Available at: http://thefieldnx.com, accessed on: 25 November 2015.

[100] MayDay Rooms is an educational charity, which was founded in 2009 in London to archive historical material that is connected, in some way, to social movements, experimental culture, and the radical expression of marginalized people. Through different programmes, they study those archives in relation to contemporary struggles and hope to reconfigure further knowledges within them. Available at: http://maydayrooms.org/about, accessed on: 10 March 2014

[101] No.W.Here is a not-for-profit artist-run organisation. They combine film production alongside critical dialogue about contemporary image making by supporting the production of artist works. To do so, they run workshops and critical discussions, and actively curate performances, screenings, residencies, publications, events, and exhibitions. Available at: http://www.no-w-here.org.uk, accessed on 10 March 2014.

conceptually challenge their own work and reflect on it through a collective mode. As the artists state in the exhibition leaflet:

> "Let it not be said... is not an exhibition per se, nor is it a research process made public, nor a collection of screenings or performances, or talks or pedagogical experiments. It may at times resemble all of these, or borrow from their grammar, but it begins with the premise that we have entered another time."[102]

By attempting to re-articulate a different understanding of time, *London Common(s) Course*, became a point of departure for Anastas and Gabri. With a view to develop their project into a set of collective studies and experiences in commoning in different cities, the sites of London Common(s) Course became spaces of un/doings. In so thinking, their methodology became concerned with possibilities of withdrawing from those communities where social relations have become "monetised or dictated" by some system of "promissory note, credit, debt, and capital"[103]. The artists and participants, at various stages of the project and throughout, inhabit some improvisational techniques, which I emphasise within this study as a capacity to develop my study of 'curatorial-ability'.

I argue that this ability could provide different possibilities to re-articulate the domain of audience via different forms of cooperational and social re/production of art as a real experience within interrupted times. Anastas and Gabri practise with potentialities by which cooperational forms help to address new aspects of artistic production at a point of encounter between artist, institution, and public. This multilayered project speculates on a temporary, autonomous move, whereby a temporarily, produced within different time–space, re-articulates the understanding of the "common(s)", by interrupting cyclical, directional, and linear times.

In doing so, I clarify a twofold problem: On one hand, how is it possible to disconnect from time through improvising, without falling into a merely conceptual performance? On the other hand, how to perform within the collective, yet accentuate the individual implementation? Being cautious with these questions, I nonetheless aim to expand the act of Improvising as an ability to form new grounds on which socially oriented art practices can reflect on their own condition.

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[102] Anastas, A., & Gabri, R. 27 February–29 March 2014, *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply Just Making Art*, exhibition leaflet, London: The Show Room. It is important to mention that this project was supported by the Showroom and was realised in the framework of COHAB, a two-year collaborative project with Casco, Office for Art, Design and Theory, Utrecht, and Tensta Konsthall, Stockholm, supported by a Cooperation Measures grant from the European Commission Culture Programme (2007–2013). Moreover, the Arts Council England supported their project in partnership with the Delfina Foundation.

[103] The *Common(s) Course,* available at: http://16beavergroup.org/common/, accessed on: 27 August 2015.

2.7. Let It Not Be Said...

Transcription of a Continuous Interruption

Anastas, Rene Gabri, 2014; left: *The Land Flowing with Milk and Honey*; right: *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply, Just Making Art*.

The audio-visual representation in Anastas and Gabri's work is not an unusual way to present stories and thoughts, but it offers a different approach to altering the possibilities available for "thinking" and "imagining the space–time".[104] Their project begins with embodying a series of questions (examples will be given afterwards) and unfolds onto imagining different possibilities to address, read, and deal with different complexities relating to those questions. I examine the curatorial moments of their practice in which 'improvising' becomes a tool for them to propose possible ways of dealing with the social, political, and epistemological issues related to their main questions.

The *Continuous Film*, a series of daily screenings, was intended to stay hospitable to its own time and space, while nonetheless interrogating it and changing at each edition.[105] On particular days and times during the exhibition a film was produced, edited, and screened for the public. While doing so, the artists set up a workshop and studio on the top floor of the London art space The Showroom, while simultaneously projecting themselves at work on the ground floor of the same building.

The *Continuous Film* generated a new ground on which film and performance encountered each other. Having research-based material at their disposal, the artists joined films and performances together in order to represent these materials differently. This meeting point between the media has been described as a "lecture-performance" by Fiona Geuss. It is

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[104] Anastas, A., & Gabri, R. Some Preliminary Notes for London, available at:
http://commoningtimes.org/texts/notes_on_a_c_f_a_d.pdf, accessed on: 13 May 2014.
[105] Anastas, A., & Gabri, R. 27 February–29 March 2014, *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply Just Making Art*, exhibition leaflet. London: The Showroom.

utterly unrehearsed and conducted without the artists being physically present. As Geuss writes, "It operates as a space in potential, at which debates on the concept of the "artwork" can circulate."[106] The lecture-performance openly configures a different relationship between art and knowledge, and explores this relationship through the notion of performativity.

The lecture-performance was initiated in the 1960s as a sub-genre of performance art.[107] One example is Robert Morris's *21.3* (1964), in which the artist lip-synced, or dubbed, a lecture by the famous art historian Erwin Panofsky, in front of a New York audience. Some counted this work as "an early sign of the artist's ongoing resistance to an art history bound by categorisations based on period and style".[108] Morris used the simple format of lecture, perhaps for the first time, as an artistic medium, to investigate the conventional formations not only of the artwork, but also of the mechanisms of the context of art. Analogously, Anastas and Gabri's performance in performing improvised talks during the *Continuous Film* engage with unorthodox forms of representation of art and the conceptual apparatuses with which they create art at the very moment of exhibiting their art. *Let It Not Be Said...* was accompanied by a number of interviews produced by the artists prior to the exhibition and presented in form of videos via a few monitors placed on pedestals. Anastas and Gabri's alternative account of the work was clearly stated both within the exhibition itself and in the textual material surrounding it.

The exhibition space for Anastas and Gabri turns into a space between thinking and writing, editing and selecting, cutting and mending, withdrawing and generating, which anticipates the possibility of liberation. In the process of the production of the film, the artists operate in the gap between withdrawal and preparation, by using the material that they have learned and gathered, from both their earlier works and current explorations. It is important to realise that the artists position themselves at a gap between their past and upcoming works. As a result of rereading their own practice in connection with temporal and spatial alterations, it could be suggested that a curatorial aspect is traceable in their practice.

The editing, speech, and selection of material by Anastas and Gabri during the production of their film display elements of improvisation. For Anastas and Gabri, the improvised form of representation is cautiously chosen as the way to create a moving image via constant negation of time and space, so that the artwork is not lost by being restricted to the

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[106] Geuss, F. January 2011, "Lecture Performance". available at: http://thepublicschool.org/node/3084, accessed on: January 2013.

[107] This mode of operation continued throughout the following decades and was experienced in the practice of different artists. Some of the iconic practices include Dan Graham's Performer/Audience/Mirror; 1975, Joseph Beuys's *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler – Auf dem Weg zur Freiheitsgestalt des sozialen Organismus*/ (Each Person an Artist – on the Way to the Freedom Figure of the Social Organism); 1978, and Andrea Fraser's *Museum Highlights*; 1989. It could be said that Morris's practice was concerned with thematised language or the question of how to speak about art, whereas Dan Graham focused on the viewer, while Fraser reflected the institutional critique. See Milder, P. 2011, "Teaching as Art: The Contemporary Lecture-Performance" in *Being Contemporary Journal of Performance Art,* MIT Press Journal, Vol. 34 Issue 1, January 2012, p.93-11, available on: https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/PAJJ_a_00077

[108] Practice of History Research Group, 2013, Resistible History: Afterlives in 1.3, (1964/1994). Central Saint Martin: University of London, available arts.ac.uk/csm/category/research/practices-of-history.

representation itself. This allows the conjectural meanings and imaginative concepts to form a kind of practice that freely negates and affirms its own queries. Respectively, it is central to understand how this kind of practice works within social spaces and shared times as the practice of commoning.

Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, 26 February–29 March 2014, *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply, Just Making Art*; image courtesy of Fereshte Moosavi, Anastas and Gabri.

For instance, one of the screenings started with a blank, black image on the wall. Two speakers, in different corners of the room, broadcast a faint noise, which little by little grew louder, until eventually it reached a level that was disturbing. Subsequently, an image appeared on the white wall between the speakers showing water, a river's surface. Gabri's voice was heard, reading some notes: "not an inquiry on democratisation of the money, the social relation and its effects on money ... the withdrawal of the artists from the state of representation ...".[109] His voice was heard over the sound of pouring water, and the picture of the river's surface cut to an image of Gabri putting a kettle on to boil. We, the audience seated on the floor and looking at the screen, could see him carrying the notebook from which he was reading. The image then changed to show a different part of the space in which a workshop was set up.

At that point, Anastas appeared on the screen, reading an excerpt from a book that she had picked at random (so it seemed) from a pile. We had no idea what the title or author of the text were, but it consisted of a discussion of the notion of the common(s). At the same time, Anastas was seated behind a mixer board monitoring a few cameras situated around the workshop. The cameras were pointed at Gabri and Anastas, as well as at whatever they encountered throughout the performance – books, notes, pictures, a suitcase in the corner of the room, a bunch of pens and markers arranged in a small vase, other cameras, and a white fabric screen standing in one corner of the room.

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[109] Anastas, A. & Gabri, R., February – March 2014, *Let It Not Be Said...*, London: The Show Room.

There were times that the live screening from the room above our heads cut to video archive footage, such as the surface of the river, sometimes in a close shot, sometimes wide enough to give an idea of land in the far distance. There were pictures of people digging the land. Anastas read some other texts, about a woman born in Westminster, London, at which point the screen cut to a picture taken from *The Economist*, dated the same day as the performance was taking place. Anastas started to read from her notes: "If capitalism has thrived on separating the deeds from the doings, common(s) describe the places which mend again and nurture along those relations between the things that are produced and the doings and the doers that are producing".[110] As we listened, the screen showed the pages of a small book, which included illustrations of naked bodies being torn apart.

The method through which Anastas and Gabri's film is produced is not completely unaware of its past or its future, yet it operates in a particular way such that production, reproduction, presentation, and representation are made possible in an improvised manner. The preparation of the exhibition and the workshop, wherein the editing, cutting, and production of the film take place, puts forward the possibility that an experience can be shared. Each single screening reproduces an altered or a new version by using different texts, new footage, and novel arrangements of what they have at their disposal. Although the artists perform, for the most part, with the material and objects that they have to hand, they nonetheless have no prearranged structure. For instance, only in one of the screenings were there direct references to "money": The audience sees Anastas playing with a pile of coins, tossing them around on a table. The sounds made by the coins as they were thrown back on the table were loud and strong as the echo filled the room.

The improvisation is without foresight. Nonetheless, as Moten writes, "that which is without foresight is nothing other than foresight".[111] For Anastas and Gabri, improvisation is a method that does acquire some sort of anticipation of its subject matter. Moreover, improvisation, in the way they use it, could not haphazardly produce a new form with what has been anticipated. It may seem to be doing so, but the malformed structure is a form in itself. In thinking of improvisation as a method that activates the journey from time (form) to non-time (deform), how we can understand what keeps form attached to its journey? To put it another way, the question is: how can we show the necessity for a kind of a method that looks ahead, while shaping what is being looked at? In a discussion of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, Moten writes:

> "…if improvisation is to be thought other than simply action or speech without prevision, you need to look ahead with a kind of torque that shapes what's being looked at. You need to do so without the constraints of association, by way of twisted

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[110] Ibid.
[111] Moten, F. 2003, p. 63.

epoché, or redoubled turn, in the prescription and extemporaneous formation and reformation of rules, rather than the following of them."[112]

Keeping this line of thought in mind, the torque by which improvisation is made possible in *Continuous Film*, is shaped from the archival material, workshop, camera, sound recording, mixer, as well as the open-ended film, the lack of preparation, the absence of forethought, and the lack of prescriptive vision. By the same token, the concepts and queries they propose throughout the film turn from historical material to a far-reaching horizon. At different parts of the film or performance, various anecdotes and excerpts from selected publications relate to the history of colonisation. Consequently, their proposition on *Withdrawing from the Community of Money* reflects their concerns about the postcolonial condition. The formation and reformation of rules occurs in a shifting moment where all decisions are suspended in extemporaneity: appearing or taking place during the same period. Anastas and Gabri in their exhibition catalogue write:

> "Viewing time versus making time. Life time versus time represented. Inhabited time versus edited time. Our time versus their time. We are swimming in the river of time of everyone and everything that came or is coming and in its becoming. History obviously did not start today and the horizon is far from reaching."[113]

Through the temporality of such moments, an anarchic and rootless move forms, critically accessing the pre-existing material while driving an unplanned and futurity route. On one hand, the film enters the present moment, wherein the audio-visual production takes place. This can be seen in how the artists, in the workshop, experiment and perform with different materials. On the other hand, the film cannot manifest a pure presence, because it grabs ideas from its past time and constantly anticipates a time that is yet to come. In this regard, Kodwo Eshun in his text "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism" expounds on the trajectory of Afrofuturism while he argues that the understanding of history necessarily includes a sense of temporality as anticipating what is to come[114]. Eshun claims that the cultural moment, which consistently appeals to the future, in fact hides the present in all its unhappiness. This creates an urgent need to think about the production of the future and be cautious about the power of control through future; in other words, the power of control that can be extended by particular understanding of the future.

The *Continuous Film* derives its name from its cinematic technique, and its consistent daily alterations over the course of the exhibition. It is an attempt to locate forms of

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[112] *Invisible Man*, a novel by Ralph Ellison published in 1952, addresses many of the social and political issues facing African-Americans in the United States of America at the beginning of the twentieth century. Reflecting on questions such as black nationalism and the encounter between black identity and Marxism, the narrator of the story – the Invisible Man – faces issues of individuality and struggles around personal identity within the shifting modern society of his time.

[113] Anastas, A., & Gabri, R. "Some Preliminary Notes on A Continues Film Altered Daily", February–March 2014, *Let It Not Be Said...,* London: The Show Room. Available at: http://commoningtimes.org/texts/notes_on_a_c_f_a_d.pdf, accessed on: 18 May 2014.

[114] Eshun, K. 2003, "Further Considerations on Afrofuturism". *The New Centennial Review*, Michigan: Michigan State University Press pp. 287–302.

correspondence to political experiences and insights, by demonstrating a different mode of sensing the time. In this way, existing distributions of power are resisted, and a possible, altered relationship with time is suggested. This relationship with time is a break through the existing time, as quoted earlier in the artists' statement, "viewing time versus making time. Life time versus time represented. Inhabited time versus edited time".[115]

Because of the particular space of the screening, which took place downstairs in the gallery and upstairs inside the "workshop", the audience were offered a different way of viewing and engaging with the work. The pictures were changed from one side of the room to another and from one video clip to the next, with no preliminary planning. The audience were faced with some close-up scenes, such as pictures of the book from which the artists were reading or of the wrinkles on their skin as they drank their coffee. Through such representations, the audience could track the editing processes of the film with the artists at the very moment that the *Continues Film* was being created.

It was as if an extemporising moment was formed collectively because of the immediacy of the practice and the constant change of the direction in the creation of the film. Even more significant to the question of curatorial, in another section of their practice, Anastas and Gabri expand their project into the city and set different challenges to relocate their artistic approaches through a series of events organised collectively and in collaboration with a number of spaces in London.

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[115] Anastas, A., & Gabri, R. 27 February–29 March 2014, *Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply Just Making Art*, exhibition leaflet. London: The Show Room.

2.8. Problematising the Common via Collective Improvisation Within the Contemporary Art Spaces

To regenerate their project in the city of London and in direct engagement with the audience, Anastas and Gabri proposed a model of practice that originated in a contributing and collective format. Titled the *London Common(s) Course*, this project embodied the vulnerability of both artistic autonomy and art spaces to the potentials of collective acts and the possibilities of common spaces, respectively. Engaging 'improvising' as a central implement, Anastas and Gabri on seven occasions organised public events in several locations in London, including Common House, MayDay Rooms, No.W.Here, The Field (in collaboration with New Cross Commoners), and The Showroom.[116] With the aim of opening new horizons to understand the common and of questioning the social powers, they operated a collective at a border between art-making, exhibition-making, and event-making. In their own words, their practice is "conjoined different ideas, efforts, practices, and struggles for and through common(s)".[117]

How could collective modalities or con-temporising (together-with-time) be recognised in the act of commoning? Collectives that were formed within or through the *Common(s) Course* seem to develop a model for equal sharing of different realities of struggle. Through reading their practice in connection with 'improvising' at various art spaces in London, this concept could be realised that a spontaneous, conversational format helps to share diverse struggles of the same context. I will argue that Anastas and Gabri's work collectively creates conversations and reflects on the contemporary condition with a strong connection to 'improvising'. In doing so, they disrupt, resist, and alter systematised forces of art production and reconfigure existing knowledges around them. In fact, the common that has emerged from their practice is a series of challenging suppositions about the relationship between artists and their condition, as well as the relationship between art and social concerns.

In so doing, Anastas and Gabri underline the question of sharing and commonality within different art and cultural spaces, which struggle to stay outside the conventional models of established institutions of arts. Among the several texts and publications that were discussed during the *Common(s) Course* was "The Production of Commons", in *The Beginning of History* by Massimo De Angelis. He suggests that "The Production of Commons", is a problem or a question that emerges from a moment of division within the struggling body politic.[118] Operating outside the conventional spaces of galleries and museums, *Common(s)*

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[116] For more information about these places, see Section 2.6. COMMONING TIMES, of this thesis.
[117] Available at: http://commoningtimes.org/london/, accessed on 17 August 2015.
[118] De Angelis, M. 2007, "The Production of Commons", in *The Beginning of History, Value of Struggles and Global Capital.* London: Pluto Press.

Course is posited at a point of division regardless of the scale of the social action in which it takes place. In his book *The Beginning of History, Value Struggles and Global Capital*, De Angelis challenges mainstream economic theory by putting forward an alternative approach to the impact that it has on contemporary life. His critical attitude to radical change within social structures traces them in spaces of sharing, conviviality, and commonality, which are constantly formed by struggles. By placing this creative reproducibility of values at the centre of anti-capitalist theory, he suggests new approaches to the concepts of "anarchism, socialism, and communism". De Angelis writes:

> "It is at that juncture that the ability to problematise the common and recompose struggles on that new terrain allows the struggle to move forward onto a new plane, to climb a step in the ladder of the fractal panopticon and contribute towards extending the articulation amongst the struggles."[119]

The positive account that is remarkable here is not the formation of the common itself. Rather, it is how to recognise the struggle and the disrupted moment in which there is a possibility for the formation of the common. Of course, this cannot be prescriptive that commons are often produced by struggles, so that whenever there is a struggle, a common would be produced. But, it is a query as to what keeps the common. In other words, once the struggle is recognised and the common is formed, what keeps the common together? Therefore, to reconfigure the struggle is to problematise the common.

The production of the common, occurring at the point of struggle within the social body is a condition within which 'improvising' can be made possible, particularly because the common can only survive through the continuity of their act of commoning. The meetings organised by Anastas and Gabri continued with a series of group discussions around the institution of the common, unpacking the struggles by which temporary common forms. In different spaces in which *London Common(s) Course* took place, through spontaneous conversations, a shared struggle formed among the audience. The partakers included both a group who regularly participated in the course and another group who were invited or informed by the host venue at every occasion. This sharing developed by keeping the common as a collective mode, which rendered the shared struggle visible. By suggesting Improvising as an alternative tool available to the whole participating audience and the artists, the meetings turned into collective attempts to reconfigure their struggles in connection with others, although from different entry points.

A *Common(s) Course* was prepared under the umbrella of an ongoing inquiry *A Common(s) Course: Commoning The City & Withdrawing from the Community of Money*, which came about as a collective (David Harvey, Silvia Federici, George Caffentzis), formed by 16 Beaver Group at the edge of the Occupy Wall Street Movement in New York in 2011.[120] London

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[119] Ibid, p. 238.
[120] Because 16 Beaver Group organised their project around the question of capital and the *Community of Money*, it may be useful to briefly mention some of the funding strategies that 16 Beaver Group have used to be able to run their

Common(s) Course ask how can a more integrated space–time be created for thinking and potentially acting in the city together? By engaging in conversations with a precarious network of cultural practitioners and collectives, they attempt to reconfigure forms of knowledges that can operate as an effective response to social and political disruptions. In other words, at the point of division within a struggling body of people (in this case artists, curators, and scholars), a form of common was created in order to interrogate its condition, withdraw from its forceful structures and re-articulate alternative modes of operation.

The *London Common(s) Course* brought together various groups of artists and activists from and in the spaces mentioned earlier, whose works, one way or another, are concerned with similar understandings of struggles as operations within social and cultural fields; for instance, the precariousness of post-crisis conditions for freelance curators and unpaid artists as well as the budget cuts for non-profit spaces were among some of the topics discussed. By problematising the understanding of the common among the participants, the possibility of reconfiguring the shared struggles was realised. With a view to Anastas and Gabri's method of facilitating conversational events among the community of artists, curators, researchers, and cultural practitioners, the following question is important to address:

How can we address the common while thinking of artistic practices and curatorial methodologies?

If the common is a practice of coming together for equal access to resources (to the degree of surviving in some cases), or forming an equally shared access to knowledge, the core question or problem is how the act of commoning can function so that survival is sustainable? It is important to consider the fact that the formation of the common at the momentum of the division within the struggling body is in fact the result of resisting such division. The commoning, therefore, responds to the struggle with a different approach and, as a result, re-produces knowledge and re-articulates value within itself.

For example, MayDay Rooms, which host two of the events organised by the London Common(s) Course, was founded in 2009 as an educational charity and a place for archiving historical material, which in some way relates to a social movement, a political experience, or the radical expression of a precarious group. Through various projects, these archives were re-examined in relation to contemporary struggles. The response to the struggle was a

projects. 16 Beaver Group rely on money and donations. They write: "In 15 years of existence, we have managed to do what we do, without any funding. 4 years ago, we had a problem with our lease which required us to ask friends and people who support the space to donate money". They raised the necessary sum to continue "to maintain the space for people to donate to the space". They accept donations and work without salaries – in other words, with a charitable approach. "We do it out of commitment and conviction and desire". The money that comes in through donations is spent on maintaining the space and online platforms. Available at: http://16beavergroup.org/common/, accessed on: 16 August 2015. Occupy Wall Street (OWS) is the name given to a protest movement that began on September 17, 2011, in Zuccotti Park, in New York City's Wall Street financial district. It received global attention and spawned the Occupy movement, protesting against social and economic inequality worldwide. It was inspired by anti-austerity protests in Spain coming from the 15-M movement. Cf., Writers for the 99%. 2011, *Occupying Wall Street, the Inside Story of an Action that Changed America*. New York and London: OR Books.

reformation of the common, which through different states of time is continuously being reshaped.

To facilitate collective gatherings and commoning connections between "users of the building, its archives, and various digital platforms for dissemination", MayDay Rooms' space became the main home for both the archive and the various meetings and programmes. Its work is made possible by providing communal spaces, such as reading, meeting, and screening rooms, in which the archival material can be explored and researched with the intention of activating its relationship with the ongoing condition. The growing collections confront the extensive risk of collective memory and historical continuity, and provide possibilities for rereading and reconfiguring these questions.[121]

In this respect, the London Common(s) Course, with the idea of reading together and inviting friends and scholars to crisscross thoughts and think together about concepts around a contemporary approach, was sharing a common ground with MayDay Rooms. Moreover, the meetings would sometimes begin with a preliminary note or a story, which outlined the question of why the "common" is worth examining. However, this would unfold towards further queries about the ways in which the host site is dealing with or relating to the problems of commoning from their perspectives.

To give another example, the fourth meeting was held on 20 March 2014 at the No.W.Here. Rene Gabri began his talk by telling us the story of his and Anastas's visit to the city of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2007, to attend the city's largest art initiative and one of the most important art happenings in the country, Sharjah's Biennale. Gabri described how, following an early morning visit to the main square of the city, where a huge number of workers convene to be picked up for the day's work, the sense of the common seemed very real. The migrant workers and their critical condition became the artists' main focus to see what they could learn from the situation of the workers. Beginning from questions such as "what is the migrant's voice", "the politics of the voice", and "where is the place in which the political voices can take refuge", they produced texts and photographs, as well as recordings of the migrants' voices. However, as Gabri explained, they discovered during their next visit a few years later that a fence had been placed around the square, dividing the centre from its surroundings and preventing the workers' access to their morning gatherings.

For Gabri and Anastas, the important question seemed to be about what they could do with this knowledge. Through a series of meetings and panel discussions in collaborations, they have raised awareness of the condition of the workers in the UAE, thereby putting that knowledge back into the political realm. Yet, conditions like that of the workers do not always have the chance to become politicised knowledges and thus to be reconfigured onto a new context. At the same time, the artists hoped that some of the knowledge might return, in a

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[121] See., The History of MayDay Rooms, available at: http://maydayrooms.org, accessed August 2015.

more sustainable way, to reproduce the common. The urgency of thinking and talking about the institution of the common, as Gabri stated, is as important as how one relates to them.

2.9. Improvising Publicness via a Reciprocal Dialogue and a Mutual Education

London Common(s) Course, Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, meeting at The Field and New Cross Commoners, 30 March 2014, New Cross, London. Available at: https://newxcommoners.wordpress.com

The transformations in contemporary art practices have indicated an inevitably unclear distinction between the role of curator and artist in relation to educational abilities of art and its field. In his essay "Letter to Jane (Investigation of a Function)", Simon Sheikh discusses the forms of mediations by expanding on the figure of curator in relation to the pedagogical functions of art institutions. He argues that what is taking place in non-public spaces of institutions, whether in actual spaces such as offices, storages, workshops, and so on, or in pedagogical spaces, gives another sort of access to the artwork. He writes:

> "It is always about more than just looking, about looking 'justly', looking in the appropriate manner, getting it right and not wrong. It implies that there is something that one cannot see without introduction, that a certain knowledge the right view and even the 'right point of view' - can be transmitted from the institution, through to

mediator, onto the audience, or, perhaps we should simply say, through mediation, i.e. through pedagogy in its many forms and mediums."[122]

With a view to expanded spaces for pedagogical experiences within the institutions of art, two crucial points must be highlighted: on the one hand, the developing capacities of curatorial in socially oriented forms of practices, and on the other hand, boundless forms of pedagogical experience. Shifting the main concern from the transformation of knowledges only through the medium of exhibition to a concern with experiencing an alternative production of the social or the common is an essential change. Regarding the core investigation of this thesis on different abilities of curatorial practice, what still needs to be address is how can we produce possibilities for the reconfiguration of knowledges through dialogical forms of practice instead of production of knowledge through non-reciprocal forms of education? How could the point of encounter between the public, artist, curator, institution, and art-field be made possible without utter dependence on the "artwork" and established agencies?

Simon Sheikh suggests that the pedagogical capacities of institutions' and exhibition-making's modes of address should consider a new public and should re-approach their relationship with the public by redirecting the processes of curation and mediation towards a new potential of "publicness". He continues:

> "What should at the very least be parallel processes are too often rendered contradictory and counterproductive. Surely, then, the pedagogical or educational turn is, at best, an attempt to reconnect these processes, to recover what has been lost and, at its most ambitious, it becomes an attempt to redirect these processes towards a new self-reflexivity, a new auto-critique, even towards a new potential of 'publicness', and renewal of how 'publics' are conceived and produced."[123]

Sheikh's concern is with the exigency of a new approach to redirecting the processes of practices with curatorial capacities and pedagogical concerns; however, his suggestions are limited to a critique of institutions, a specific public, and a particular aspect of curating – that of exhibition-making. Nonetheless, the capacity to become "self-reflexive", to develop an "auto-critique", has to be considered as an essential quality of the curatorial, not only within and beyond exhibition-making, but also within and beyond artistic practices.

Thus, the conditions for a pedagogical turn are the foremost component within the curatorial field. Although in his discussion, Sheikh remains concerned for the most part with exhibitionary modes, his point regarding the anti-pedagogical impulse forms an interesting

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[122] Sheikh, S., 2010, "Letter to Jane (Investigation of a Function)", in O'Neil p., & Wilson, M., *Curating and the Educational Turn*, eds., London: Open Edition/de Appel, p. 64.

[123] Ibid, p.68.

connection with the possibility of the reconfiguration of knowledges, rather than the production of them.[124] On one hand, this would provide a different approach to the paradoxical relation of an anti-pedagogical pedagogue, and on the other hand, it turns from the disciplinary modes to "emancipatory pedagogies".[125]

> "Such emancipatory pedagogies must work for another production of the social that can include people's experiences with art as well as outside of art, in the very encounter with the interlocutor, the situation and the other participants. The instituting, then, will be a series of dialogues and discussions without an end or resolution – more an expansion of the questions without a simplification or even a foreclosure."[126]

Developing this thought further, the abilities of curatorial practice provide possibilities not only for educational methods and for critical approaches to knowledge and power, but also, possibilities for the reconfiguration of the knowledges beyond exhibitionary means. The question is how can we shift focus from producing the public and producing knowledges for them, to recognising the public and reconfiguring knowledges with them? That is to say, the public that Sheikh is addressing exists inside the museum and in front of the artworks and is represented by the docent, who is a volunteer and "much closer to the life-world and experience of the audience than say the curator or the artist".[127]

Anastas and Gabri's work provided possibilities for mutual pedagogical mediations, between all of the participants including the artists and the hosting bodies. In this sense, the work did not need an intermediary figure to be determined as curator or artist. By analysing another aspect of their work that took place in non-institutional public spaces, I argue how the practice itself also became an access point. To put it differently, engendered by new forms of representation, fields of conversation, and the possibility of mutual recognition, their work offered access to different forms of knowledges, while sharing and reconfiguring them collectively.

How could the encounter with the interlocutor and the experience of common shape the moment of curatorial? To understand the relation between forms of alteration and the possibilities for mutual education, the ability of 'improvising' was in operation as a walk with *London Common(s) Course* continued. Suggested by the title of their project, Commoning The City & Withdrawing from The *Community of Money*, the discussions among the participants were naturally related to the main question: how can we withdraw from the

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[124] Ibid, p. 70.
[125] In this regard, three remarkable essays from the period of conceptualism are important to bear in mind: Umberto Eco's "The Poetic's of the Open Work" (1959), Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation" (1964), and Roland Barthes's "The Death of the Author" (1967). Simon Sheikh describes these as different ways of undoing the power of discourse to find "liberation in openness, silence, even death." Sheikh, S., ibid, p.73.
[126] Sheikh, S. Ibid, p. 75.
[127] Ibid, p. 67.

community of money? As we were walking, the Improvising act generated a kind of torque to allow us to look for non-knowledge more eagerly than the shared knowledge.

London Common(s) Course, visiting the Greenstreet Hill and the Common Growth Community Garden, 2014. Images by New Cross Commoners, available at https://newxcommoners.wordpress.com, accessed 26 Nov 2015.

The last meeting of the London Common(s) Course took place on 30 March 2014 and was hosted by The Field and the New Cross Commoners, two artist-run initiatives in New Cross, southeast London, where most of the group members lived and worked. As Certeau suggests, "The neighbourhood appears as a domain in which the space–time relationship is the most favourable for a dweller who moves from place to place on foot, starting from his or her home".[128] To continue the discussions on the common, a collective walk was taken in the neighbourhood, with no preparation or pre-planning. There was a space of time within which the act of walking and improvising took place.

The walk followed an initial introduction by us, the participants. It felt as if our unplanned walk was setting off with some powerful, improvised happenings. Soon after we left The Field, we saw a group of approximately ten people on the other side of the crossroad, gathered under a large tree. They were listening to a middle-aged man who was pointing to different buildings around the junction as he spoke. When we got closer to the crowd, his voice became clearer, and we could hear him giving historical information about the buildings. We then realised that they were taking a tour of the New Cross area, organised by the local

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[128] De Certeau, M., Giard, L., Mayol, P., & Tomasik, T.J. trans., 1998, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, p. 10.

Council. By spending a short period with the tour, we gathered some historical facts about the surrounding area, and then continued our walk in a different direction.

The continuation of the walk presented us with more thought-provoking points; while exploring the area we came across places such as the Common Growth Community Garden and the Greenstreet Hill housing co-operative, which will be discussed further below. But most important is the alternative form of pedagogical practice that was in place within this practice. The complex techniques and processes of control over individualisation that takes most of the educational systems within the institutions were replaced by a collective improvisation and a co-operative approach. The proliferation of theoretical and abstract conversations was carried out through a very common form of practice: walking in a neighbourhood. The walk was the last meeting, after other gatherings with the group had distributed and shared, in numerous discussions, knowledges of the notion of the common.

Instead of direct interaction with art within an art centre, the participants/viewers in this practice turned into sort of collaborators, and the neighbourhood became their field of investigation. For example, two locations on the walk, Common Growth Community Garden and Greenstreet Hill, became the focus of the conversations through which a series of social, political, and financial relations were reconfigured. As a result, the participants became aware of the mediating capacities of buildings, urban conditions, and their involvement in the formation of an art practice.

The first place, Common Growth Community Garden, was formed by the locals in 2010 to give function to bare land that was owned by Lewisham Council, to grow food, meet, talk, and learn. The second location, Greenstreet Hill, was a small co-operative self-built housing complex constructed in 1997. In fact, the former project began in April 2011 to transform the land into a food-growing space, which gave the whole community an opportunity to articulate their local presence and their relationship with their community as a whole. They also organised structured training sessions, particularly for children, local residents, and job seekers.[129]

Without any preparation as such, with no foresight of what would cross our path, the participants became engaged in long conversations with the residents and locals, discussing the practical conditions of housing during the 1990s in the UK. The Housing Act (1974), enacted by the Labour Party, gave state funding to non-profit housing schemes, such as co-operatives. Under this scheme, which continued until the mid-1980s, hundreds of housing co-ops had been set up. "This went hand-in-hand with the emergence of housing action groups, tenants' associations and neighbourhood and community councils as people attempted to gain more control over their housing".[130] As a result of reciprocal conversations,

129 Cf., http://growwild.org.uk/common-growth-community-garden, accessed on 25 August 2015.
130 Anderson, T., Lawrence, B. Alternatives: Housing co-ops. *Corporate Watch Magazine*, 50, Autumn/Winter 2011, available at: http://corporatewatch.org/
/50/autumnwinter-2011/alternatives-housing-co-ops, accessed on: 26 November 2015.

a set of knowledges regarding the socio-political changes were reconfigured so the community shared the methods they have employed for alternative sustainable living.

'Improvising' as an ability for curatorial practice raises a series of concerns in relation to the notion of the common as a form of survival through struggle. In Anastas and Gabri's work, improvising is to enter another domain of time, as a con-temporising, while collectively forming a political ground. In other words, an alternative approach to time and spaces is formed within and by different co-operative acts. Furthermore, the potential for improvising was complicated further through the possibilities of collectively reconfiguring the knowledge of the neighbourhood and historical implications that formed their lives. 'Improvising' was employed as an ability and a method that could fabricate a radical change in thought. Although, it disrupts and alters conditions, it also resists a full transformation into a new absolute form, instead continuing to disrupt the existing structured powers.

With this in mind, not only is the exhibition space (The Showroom) turned into a potential platform for education, but so too are the other spaces, such as MayDay Rooms, The Field, and the common areas of the neighbourhood, which turned into alternative spaces of representation, reciprocal dialogue, and mutual education. Furthermore, those forms of activity such as walks and talks, as part of the course, provided possibilities to address a new common and how to keep commoning. Most importantly, this created collective approaches to the reconfiguration of knowledges by critically exploring what are common resources or common knowledges. This form of collective operation was such that the practice would necessarily form a social group, common their struggles, and become part of a practice that was socially engaged and curatorially organised.

CHAPTER 3: INHABITING STATES OF AFFAIRS

3.1. Overview

In this chapter, I aim to analyse yet another curatorial ability, which I define as 'inhabiting states of affairs.[131] Considering the curatorial in an expansive context of social and community relations (as discussed in the previous chapters), here, the significance of such inhabitation is linked to the states of affairs and challenges of art and cultural operations in global and local contexts. To do so, states of affairs are considered not simply in the sense of referring to the facts or the existence of the facts. States of affairs have matters and belongings as constituents, in which case they are different from facts and thoughts.[132] Nevertheless, there is a relation between states of affairs and the realisation of thoughts. Moreover, the question of 'how' states of things could be in any possible world marks a relation between states of affairs and modality.[133] States of affairs are the possible states of things or beings and their potentialities; regarding in what states things or beings are and in what states things or beings could be.

From a curatorial perspective, to know potentials of institutional systems of operation and independent art and cultural structures, as well as the power of people as states of affairs, demands certain actions of engaging and occupying. Hence, 'inhabiting' is discussed here as an action or a choice to reflect on problems of such states and work with their potentials. This is explored and analysed through a close study of the making of a film, titled *Salaam Cinema* (Hello Cinema, 1995) by Mohsen Makhmalbaf, against the backdrop of its sociopolitical and historical settings. *Salaam Cinema* is about a popular film audition that turns into a documentary of the process of its making. This example is analysed as a social and cultural event from a curatorial perspective and in relation to a series of states of affairs that are developed through significant modes of collective responses.

I will explore how *Salaam Cinema* undertakes the possibility of a move from filmic events to real states of affairs to endure a chaotic situation; a move which enables me to reflect curatorially on some of the questions within their sociopolitical context. The implementation of debts and economic sanctions as political measures, gradual modification of the Islamic state, adaptation of the cultural policies after Islamisation of market-oriented art productions,

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[131] D. M. Armstrong in his essay *A World of States of Affairs* suggests a system of analytical metaphysics by exploring complexities of the relations, numbers, classes as well as the possibility and necessity placed within the system of states of affairs. Armstrong, D. M. 1997, *A World of States of Affairs*., Cambridge University Press.

[132] See. Armstrong D.M., *A World of States of Affairs,* 1997, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[133] See. Wolfgang, K., "The intentionality of thinking: the difference between State of Affairs and Propositional Matter", in *Speech Act and Sachverhalt. Primary Sources in Phenomenology,* Kevin Mulligan (ed.), Vol 1, 1987, Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 175–187.

slow growth of infrastructures for art and cultural centres by private partnerships mainly owned by military force organisations, has resulted in multiple forces of auditing and verification applied to artistic and cultural production in Iran. In this regard, the difficulties and complicated process of realising an art project or a curatorial practice, which in most cases requires corporate or private funding involvements, massively limit the experimentation and artistic freedom by a complicated field of economic and political forces.

In this respect, 'inhabiting states of affairs' is explored as an act of resistance. Resistance not as only an opposition to an outer power but an internal potentiality. Giorgio Agamben in continuation of his extensive work on the notion of 'potentiality', as discussed in the INTRODUCTION, considers a significant relation between the act of resistance and the act of creation. In his 2014 lecture titled 'Resistance in Art', Agamben develops the idea of the 'act of creation as an act of resistance' echoing Gilles Deleuze's 1987 lecture on cinema titled 'What Is the Creative Act?'.[134] Agamben writes that 'Each act of creation according to Deleuze resists something' and as the potentiality that is freed by the act of creation 'must be internal to the act', likewise, the act of 'resistance must be internal to the act of creation'.[135] In the case of *Salaam Cinema,* the original idea of the audition for a film remains a potential, as the audition turns into a movie in itself as an end result. The powerful crowd refuse losing the audition and push the situation to an extent that they create their own movie. The process of making (the *Salaam Cinema)* and non-making (the supposed film), suggests an alternate relation to the situation at hand, raising the question of 'how can potentiality-not-to realise itself?'[136] As Agamben states:

> "Each potentiality is impotentiality of the same and with respect to the same. So, each potentiality of doing something is at the same time potentiality not to do something".[137]

Furthermore, those forms of states of affairs that were influential in processes of realising different forms of art and cultural activities in Iran, as stated above, suggest a strong connection with the histories of post-revolutionary situations. However, because of the complexities of political strategies employed by the Islamic state, as well as the consequences of war between Iran and Iraq for eight years, a boundless part of these histories remained concealed. The continuation of the sequential and chronological formation of history has carried some unknown pasts, which are lost histories. One way to understand the interrupted histories is to recall them in conjunction with a more contemporary situation. Correspondingly, in this chapter I undertake a practice of montage or assemblage of

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[134] Agamben, G., 2014, "Resistance in Art", European Graduate School Video Lectures, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=one7mE-8y9c, Accessed on: 27 August 2015.
[135] Ibid.
[136] Ibid.
[137] Ibid.

fragments of historical narrations that are put together from the episodic histories of Iran as a mode of anti-oppressive practice.

Given the various ways in which curatorial practice could engage with aural narrations, archival and historical material, as well as artistic documentations of various histories, the possibility of rendering oppressed knowledges and forgotten histories visible through curatorial practices is created by 'inhabiting states of affairs' as an act of resistance. How to resist the oppressed past and forgotten histories to make new forms of negotiations with current states possible? To reconfigure the histories that have remained invisible, could it be possible to revisit the situations of states of affairs in which those histories were shaped? Whether, through the imposition of order and/or particular purposes, some versions of history remain neglected, but how 'inhabiting states of affairs', can make the reconfiguration of knowledge from those pasts as an act of resistance possible?

The making of *Salaam Cinema* happens because of it resisting becoming a filmic event and this is made possible through formation of different arrangements of its affairs. By doing so, Makhmalbaf, familiar with the power of people subsequent to his involvement with revolutionary activist groups, welcomes the auditors as makers of a film that belongs to them. While exploring relationships with individuals, he reflects on larger social and political affairs and turns the audition into a documentation of a socio-experimental practice. *Salaam Cinema* provides a cinematic reading of cinema itself, by delivering the order of events into assemblages of images, and by moving from the point of view of a single director into a collective directors' mode. Juxtaposition of participants and the rearranging of actions within the event result in the emergence of new forms of power relations.

Cinema in Iran has been a voice of protest, particularly in the post-revolution era. Therefore, the relationship between cinema and the states of affairs in Iran not only provides possibilities to unpack some further social, geopolitical and financial aspects, but also, operates as a practice of resistance. As Howard Caygill's study *On Resistance* suggests, resistance cannot be reduced to a single conception which is 'amenable to legitimation and appropriation by the very state-form that it began by defying'[138]. Consequently, the most important question is how to continually reinvent the act of resistance to avoid the risk of being appropriated by the condition that produces it.

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[138] Caygill, H., 2013, *On Resistance A Philosophy of Defiance*, London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury, p. 6.

3.2. Crosscuttings on a Chaotic Situation

Crowd mourning the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, at his funeral in Tehran, June 1989. Almost 2 million people attended this event. Image available at http://i.imgur.com/SnrNdUp.jpg, accessed on 14 December 2015.

A few years before the production of *Salaam Cinema*, a crucial turn took place in the Islamic Republic of Iran's political structure, which immensely affected the social condition. The pain of eight years of war with Iraq (1980–1988), created a fatigued nation who were dejected by war, economically shattered, and with the death of their leader were divided into different political factions. The death of Ayatollah Khomeini, the founder and first leader of the Islamic Republic, on 3 June 1989, marked an end to the first decade of the post-revolution period. As Hamid Dabashi writes, this phase of Makhmalbaf's cinema 'has every trace of two brutal decades of political turmoil, a gut-wrenching revolution, and a bloody and prolonged war...'.[139] The impact of such dramatic changes are visible not only in the presented affairs within his movies, but also in his practice as a revolutionary activist since his political beliefs transform from a devoted supporter of the Revolution to a dissident of the regime. As Tirdad Zolghadr on 'Selling the Air: Notes on Art and the Desire for Social Change in Tehran' writes:

> "If ever there was an artist in the unquestioning, zealous service of social change, it is the second protagonist of post-revolutionary arthouse cinema, Mohsen Makhmalbaf. An early supporter of the new regime, Makhmalbaf reportedly worked as an interrogator in the crowded political prisons, but also as a cinema propagandist

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[139] Dabashi, H., 2007, *Masters & Masterpieces of Iranian Cinema*, Washington DC: Mage Publishers, p. 354.

authoring spectacular condemnations of the Iranian Left as a stupid horde of raving hypocrites."[140]

Most of Makhmalbaf's early movies such as *Boycott* (1985), *The Peddler* (1987), *The Cyclist* (1989) and *A Moment of Innocence* (Noon-O-Goldoon1996), are kind of self-reflexive practices engaged in the social and political condition, considering the formation of new commonalities aimed at the revolution. For instance, *Noon-O-Goldoon* is a semi-autobiography of his experience as a teenager at a political rally prior to the revolution when he gets arrested for stabbing a policeman. Another example is the *Marriage of the Blessed* (1989), which is about the story of a man traumatised by the war with Iraq and who struggles to adapt to civilian life. The desire for social change across Makhmalbaf's practice, as a filmmaker, writer and human rights activist is trackable in his critical and self-reflexive approach. His later movies have a more direct impact on social change. For instance, a documentary titled *Afghan Alphabet* (2002), had an abundant influence on the Islamic Consultative Assembly in Iran to pass a bill allowing Afghan children to attend schools in Iran, which changed the life of thousands of Afghan refugee children in Iran.

The war between Iran and Iraq, which started in September 1980 and continued until August 1988, has to be studied within the complex historical relationship between the two countries. The war was caused by a series of events which took place amongst the countries of the Persian Gulf, including the Arabian Peninsula, which held a joint security interest that was formed in the wake of Iran's revolution. A declaration in May 1980, made by the Iraqi regime, set troops along the border. Iraq strongly suggested that a replacement of the regime for the Islamic Republic of Iran was necessary, and intensified conditions at the borders by preparing the army for combat. 'Following Iraq's formal abrogation of the Algiers Accord on September 17, 1980, it immediately invaded Iranian territory, the principal military thrust of which was into the Iranian oil province of Khuzestan'.[141] The situation inside Iran, which was still dealing with the aftermath of its nationwide revolution, was becoming more chaotic, following the change of the presidency from Abdullhassan Banisadr to Ali Khamenei (the current leader of the country) in 1981. For instance, in June and September of the same year, a major riot took place on the streets of the main cities, including Tehran, by so-called Islamic Marxists. The Mujaheddin-e Khalq (People's Militia of Iran) were taking advantage of the chaotic situation inside the country that was under horrendous attacks from Iraq's army.[142]

The outcome of such networks and paradoxical power relations between conservatives, radicals and fundamentalists was still present in the following decade. In the mid-1990s,

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[140] Zolghadr, T., 2004, "Selling the Air: Notes on Art and the Desire for Social Change in Tehran", in *Art and Social Change, A Critical Reader,* Bradley, W., and Esche, C., eds., 2007, London: Tate, Afterall, p. 442.

[141] Rejali, D., 2006, "From the Inside Looking in, Sickness, War, and Remembrance in Iran", available at: Reed Magazine, Winter 2007, web.reed.edu/public-policy-series, accessed 11 November 2015.

[142] See., Cohen, R., 2009, *The Rise and Fall of the Mojahedin Khalq, 1987–1997: Their Survival After the Islamic Revolution and Resistance to the Islamic Republic of Iran*, Sussex Academic Press.

organisations such as the High Council for Cultural Revolution multiplied the control exerted over cultural sectors by an increase in pressure on censorship over the media and the press, closure of certain art and cultural discourses at the universities in order to propagate Islamic values as well as fight against student movements. Such conditions produced some insensitive systematic structures caused by fundamentalists, which resulted in the arrest of numerous academics, cultural practitioners and writers.[143] Cinema was not exempted from these changes inside the country, yet reformulated policies, applied and controlled by the new government's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance, created new possibilities for developments of Iranian cinema at the international level. However, presenting a positive image of the Islamic Republic to the outside world had to be the main factor for new productions, in order to develop foreign relations and correspondingly expand financial investments to support the post-war reconstruction programme.

Although authoritarian regulation of artistic production proliferated, those films that did not meet the Islamic Republic's criteria immediately became 'voices of protest'. This meant that many which did not gain permission to be screened and were banned from public viewing inside the country could be distributed mainly through international film festivals and external networks. This problem created a dialectical situation within the field of cinema, and generally gave certain directions to the production of cultural works and artistic expressions in various fields inside Iran. Congruently, the making of *Salaam Cinema* was a response to a dialectical condition while emphasising the potential of the cinematic mode within such states of affairs. In *Salaam Cinema*, a hidden side of cinema, its brutality, is represented and collectively practised as a creative contemplation of recent states of affairs. Moreover, Makhmalbaf's political trajectory was dealt with through 'shrewd reflexivity and docu-fictional brilliance'.[144]

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[143] Fc., Egan. E., 2005, *The Films of Makhmalbaf, Cinema, Politics & Culture in Iran*, Washington DC: Mage Publishers, p. 119.
[144] Zolghadr, T., Ibid.

3.3. Inhabiting as a Choice and Action
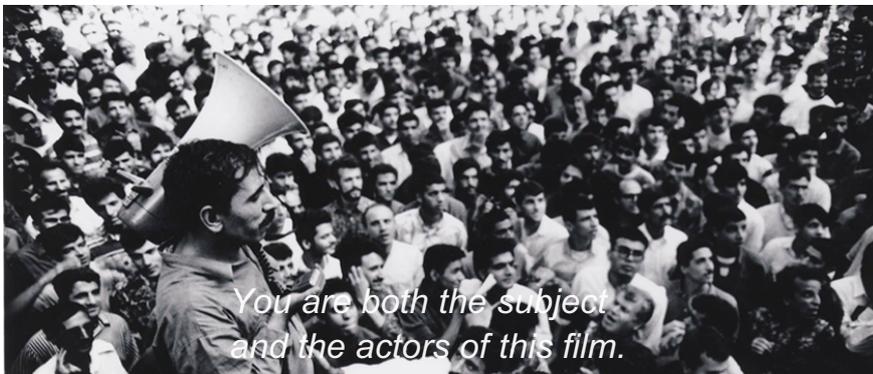
Salaam Cinema, 1995, stills from 2':30"–4':30". In the introductory section, around 3':45", the crowd rebel to grab a copy of the registration form distributed by the crew.

To work with the state of cinema as a means of promoting social and political change, *Salaam Cinema* fosters collaborative forms of interactions amongst the participants. While emphasising the power of people, it provides possibilities to collectively practice ways of creative and reflexive processes to fight back against oppression. Despite his other films in which Makhmalbaf uses cinema as a means to deliver a political message, in this unplanned situation a collective act creates that message by distribution of power and turns the decision-making process into a shared experience that both involves and affects everyone correspondingly. It could be said that the situation guides both the participants and the directing crew to act upon the condition at hand and develop a more explicit and autonomous method for inhabiting the state of affairs.

An open casting call placed in a national newspaper for Mohsen Makhmalbaf's new movie attracts five thousand amateur actors from all over the country to Tehran, generating an enormous and unexpected gathering at the announced location on the audition day. Following the moment in which the gates are forced open by the enthusiastic crowd to enter the building and get hold of the registration forms, a chaotic state is shaped. The crowd turns

the situation out of control to the extent by which Makhmalbaf make an utterly different decision for making of the film. He states that the audition is a movie in itself and everyone has a part.[145] Makhmalbaf holds a megaphone and stands in the middle of the forceful crowd, welcoming them into their own film. He says:

> "This is the hundred-year anniversary of cinema. For this reason, we are attempting to make a movie about cinema lovers. The recording has started at this very day and from this very location. ...You are both the actors and the subjects of this movie. Welcome to your own film".[146]

This announcement becomes a remarkable point from which the participating crowd are recognised as collaborating actors who could express, share, criticise and subsequently resist the risk of losing acting possibilities. Resonating with the relation between the director and the actors in *Tonight, We Improvise* by Luigi Pirandello, as discussed in the previous chapter, here, a form of improvisation takes place. Similarly, the director encourages the crowd to be subject of their own act. As a result, we could say that being recognised as actors without going through the auditing empowers the crowd to the extent that they become the makers of the movie. The strengthened experience of space and time, in which the formation of a capacity to respond authorises the crowd, creates and forms a different situation. As this occurs, the gathering site is transformed into a space of riot and breaking the boundaries between the roles of the organisers and the participating crowd.

It is important to remember that the crowd are mostly young adults in their early twenties. This is the new generation of the post-revolution and post-war era in Iran, who have only recently come out of eight years of war with Iraq and a series of intense political changes within the state following the recent death of the first regime's leader. These vulnerable art enthusiasts, for whom the conditions of life under such pressures have created the utmost economic and educational lack, seek hope in cinema, which has been almost the only successful creative industry in Iran since the revolution. In this respect, the moment in which chaos is formed by the crowd can be seen as a response to oppression, and a fight against losing the possible chance to better their lives through cinema. As Hamid Dabashi states:

> "*Salaam Cinema* is a historic document about the significance of cinema in contemporary Iran, and the strange effect that it has on a people at large."[147]

Furthermore, an internal relation between the act of resistance and the creative act takes form. To recall Agamben, the potentiality which a creative act loses or frees in the process of creating, suggests an internal component to the act itself, that is the act of resistance which is internally related to the motive to produce or create and not to produce or not to create. To

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[145] Moosavi, F., June 2013, *In Conversation with Mohsen Makhmalbaf*, London: not yet been published.

[146] Makhmalbaf, M., 1995, *Salaam Cinema*, 75 minutes, Tehran: Makhmalbaf Film House.

[147] Dabashi, H., ibid, p. 353.

put it differently, there is an oppositional but nonetheless connected relation, a paradoxical movement within the making of the film. Consequently, the filmmaking event collapses into a series of relationships between various components, shaping different states of affairs by which cinema itself becomes the field of inquiry.

With his social-experimental documentary, Makhmalbaf arranges a considerable number of interviews in which he and his crew become part of the whole operation by means of remaining observable in front of the camera on occasions. The beginning of the film shows a chaotic situation; if this had not occurred, the formation of what follows would have produced a different outcome. Makhmalbaf, in an interview conducted by myself about the making of *Salaam Cinema* suggests that:

> "Although this chaotic beginning made the practice challenging, I appreciated and recognised the new conjectures and possibilities to recreate and create something new, thereby I used everything I had at my disposal to occupy the situation differently".[148]

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[148] Moosavi, F., ibid.

3.4. Inhabiting as an Act of Resistance

Salaam Cinema, 1995, still from 7':15".

Entering the space of the unknown, the space of possibilities, the participants in *Salaam Cinema* begin to be interviewed onstage, one by one or as a group, by Makhmalbaf and his crew. A long shot, inside a large room with a high ceiling, shows the first candidate entering the room, with assistance, as he is blind. The event of the audition unfolds through a series of encounters, between both non-determined and determined components, within this designated time-space. At the top-centre of the room, we see a small, colourful semi-circular window, the end of a corridor and a staircase, connecting to this large room. In each top corner of the room, we see a set of Muqarnas structures, in plain white colours.[149] The blind man, whose name is Hadi, is wearing a pair of sunglasses, and walks into the middle of the room, where white tape marks a rectangular frame on the floor. We hear the sound of a 16 mm camera rolling.

The next image shows Makhmalbaf seated behind a table, with the cameraman at his side, and a mirror next to him where the reflection of the contestant is seen. Hadi is asked by Makhmalbaf to introduce himself and replies for confirmation that it is in fact Makhmalbaf himself who is speaking. Through this simple encounter we receive some sort of affirmation

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[149] The Muqarnas (Arabic: مقرنص; Persian: مقرنس) is a form of architectural decorative structure, an ornamented vaulting. Through geometrical subdivision of a cupola into a large number of miniature structures, Muqarnas produce a sort of cellular structure that is used on ceilings and domes in Islamic Architecture. It has also been called honeycomb because of its geometrical design. It carries various metaphorical meanings in literature, for example in Taghe Muqarnas (Muqarnas ceiling), one of the Solyman stories. Tabbaa, Y., 1985, "The Muqarnas Dome: Its Origin and Meaning", in Muqarnas journal, 1985, Vol.3, pp. 61–74, available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1523084?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents, accessed on: 12 July 2013.

and determination of the bodies and things in the room. Some information has been received. A set of imperatives, directions, colours, forms and sounds begins to operate and communicate. Furthermore, we are given evidence regarding the space and its limits.

Hadi is told that he must move within a one-metre space so that he is under the amplitude of the lights, for a better picture. All of the functionalities, imperatives and given information frame an association of limits and control. Then, Makhmalbaf leaves his desk walking towards Hadi, trying to understand the reason why Hadi is so in love with cinema despite the fact that he cannot see. As Hadi tells Makhmalbaf, it is because of such passion for cinema that he has travelled to Tehran, a long way from his own city, and has spent the night in the public park nearby, in order to be at the front of the queue on the morning of the audition. Makhmalbaf asks Hadi how he deals with this limitation, of being unable to see, when he goes to the cinema. In response, Hadi demonstrates even more passion, explaining how he relies on his friends and his own other abilities, to listen to the film and the story as it is told by those friends.

The conversation between Makhmalbaf and Hadi continues for a while, until the moment of truth. Hadi is asked to perform some characters or some acts, so that his skills can be judged by the crew. He is almost forced to take off his sunglasses, so that his facial gestures are more apparent. Despite his resistance, his desire not to do so, Hadi follows the request while bursting into tears. We learn that he is not blind but has been pretending to be so in order to showcase his acting skills. To impress Makhmalbaf with his infinite love and care for cinema, Hadi, the passionate participant offers to set up his own narrative. Makhmalbaf challenges him, with the aim of finding the link between resisting seeing and creating an act. This is not intended to oppose them to one another. Instead, it is meant to realise the interrelation between the act of resistance and the act of creation.

Incapability to see is used here as a survival strategy and to inhabit a secure space of confidence in acting. Through the ways in which participants can reconstruct their perspectives and learn to inhabit them in new ways, Makhmalbaf begins to explore with them new positionality and relationality to their collective environment. In doing so, creation of new structures for shared concern as well as individual personality shape a method with which some of the interviews are conducted. However, to develop a positive account in addressing such matters creates challenging situations for some. 'Inhabiting' in this sense operates as a strategy to tackle the unpredicted challenges of the test and to be able to deliver creative acts.

3.5. From a Single Observer to an Observational Mode

Salaam Cinema, behind the scenes, 1995, photos by Jamshid Bayrami.
 Available at http://makhmalbaf.com/?q=Photo- Gallery/salaam-cinema-photo-gallery, accessed on: 14 June 2015.

The disposition of power takes a different approach to that of the act of resistance, working towards a critical constitution of the rebellious subject via a creative alteration of reality. On the testing ground, Makhmalbaf unfolds different positions for the bodies and things recreating the scenes with the participants. As an interlocutor, he proposes different opportunities to raise a question about the relationship between power and self-responsiveness and how to act within such relations. For instance, in another scene, he invites two young female contestants to take the position of the director behind the desk, in Makhmalbaf's place, and interview the next group of participants. Through such rearrangement and distribution of power, a series of remarkable responses are formed. Having the experience of an interrogator during his involvement with revolutionary activist groups just after the Islamic Revolution, a series of revolting power games relating to the mechanism of film-industry forms between the participants.[150]

As a result of a challenging test used to demonstrate their acting abilities as to whether they can cry or laugh when they are asked to do so, a series of paradoxical tensions start to

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[150] Makhmalbaf, at the age of 15, became involved in a militant group fighting against the rule of Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the then Shah of Iran. At the age of 17, he was imprisoned for stabbing a policeman and sentenced to death. After serving five years of his sentence, he was released in the wake of the Iranian Revolution See., Zeydabadi-Nejad, S.,2013, "Madness, Resistance, and Iranian Cinema", in *Resistance in Contemporary Middle Eastern Cultures: Literature, Cinema and Music*, Laachir, K., & Talajooy, S., eds., New York, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 184–207.

activate. The problem of acting the cry or acting the laugh changes into a mode of control over the body, which tries to respond to an unknown threat. The new directors, who have been resisting the compulsion to cry or laugh while they were being tested themselves, nonetheless apply the same method when put in the position of power. After only a short period of being placed behind the desk, the two young girls know how to practice their power and control the other participants. Consequently, Makhmalbaf interrupts them and asks them back to the testing ground. At that point, the youngsters show their frustration and disappointment in their fearful voices. What seemed to be affirming their powerful position is now negated by sending them back to the row of vulnerable participants.

The constant feeling of affirmation and negation makes visible the vulnerability on two grounds, acting and not-acting, placing them on the edge of a conflict, to the extent that new concerns begin to be generated. Returned to a place of powerlessness, the two contestants wonder if they have been selected to play in Makhmalbaf's potential film after all. The exhaustion arising from the uncertainty of the situation, as well as the confusion created by the move between acting and not-acting, seems to activate a struggle in resistance. In other words, the transition, from applying force to reacting to the applied force and non-acting, provides a possibility for the critical reconfiguration of the act of resistance.

Through *Salaam Cinema* Makhmalbaf develops a particular method in order to represent the transmission of power and forms of resistance towards such controls. In doing so, he uses its specific, critical approaches, to make visible some convoluted and hidden past. The audition of another group of contestants unfolds with different subject matter, one which generates vulnerability between all of the participants in the room. The two young females stand with a middle-aged man who we learn has been Makhmalbaf's fellow inmate, Feyzollah. He is introduced by Makhmalbaf as a political prisoner during the pre-revolution period. Feyzollah is only accompanying his two young sons to be tested, but nonetheless finds himself in front of the camera, having to respond to Makhmalbaf's questions, beginning with "Feyzollah, why cinema?" "What could I do, ...perhaps my opinion and people's opinion is of a same kind." he replies.

Salaam Cinema, 1995, stills from 32':25"–52':35".

A flash back to the pre-revolution era, showing the condition of political prisoners, starts to fill the room. As we learn later in their conversation, Makhmalbaf and Feyzollah used to perform together during their imprisonment, rehearsing different performances together with other prisoners. Feyzollah's doubting of his own revolutionary beliefs and his account of 'people's'

faith urges a sense of failure or exhaustion towards the revolution. It seems that Feyzollah and his revolutionary ideals have melted into the air. Feyzollah is now a businessman with two young sons; his concern is with how he can secure the future of his children. The conversation is initially mirroring an empathy with the revolutionary generation, but this changes into a challenging situation. Makhmalbaf asks Feyzollah to step closer before telling him that his sons are rejected because they cannot act as well as the other young participants.

The role and position of the participants is being rearranged as a methodology or a technique to experience different possibilities for the practice of power. Likewise, the personal narrations operate as yet another dimension that not only contextualises some of Makhmalbaf's personal political histories but also establishes some understanding of the larger states of affairs. Through the rearrangement of participants' positions and roles, as well as the arrangement of their relationship to one another, a reflective model of practice starts to take shape. Through the conversations between Makhmalbaf, Feyzollah and the young women, three types of post-revolution generations are presented. The one who doubts the ruler's delivery and believes in the power of the people; the one who fought against capitalist imperialism but turned out to be a devoted salesman; and the one whose present is precarious and whose future is fragile. As a result of different arrangements, possibilities to inhabit different sets of conditions are created and various forms of reality are produced.

Salaam Cinema is not a pure documentary of its historical condition, but it presents different phases of social and political changes from the contemporary history of Iran through dialogical conversations that are formed with the participants. Hamid Dabashi suggests that the alteration of reality in Makhmalbaf's work becomes what he calls 'virtual realism' and 'psychological surreality'. Makhmalbaf has developed this method, altering reality into 'virtual realism', so that 'reality' does not have an oppressive control over the meaning – yet by altering that meaning, it makes other potentialities possible. In other words, 'virtual realism' in his practice provides possibilities for the representation of particular ideas and meanings without their being oppressed by systems of controls and limits. Dabashi writes:

> "Makhmalbaf's virtual realism has emerged from the creative consciousness of an artist in critical conversation with the collective unconscious of a nation. This creative source has given rise to the virtual simulation of a minimalist universe, stripped to its bare bones, a universe that one can safely call home without a particular attachment to any nation."[151]

This method of alteration has happened at large in Makhmalbaf's practice in general and his different movies. Makhmalbaf's practice, as Dabashi puts it, is altered from 'normative to creative, from ideological to aesthetic, from political to moral'.[152] Whether such categorisation

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[151] Dabashi, H., Ibid, p. 359.
[152] Ibid.

is true or not, what is crucial here is the fact that Makhmalbaf's practice inhabits a series of critical changes as part of its creative act. The rethinking of traditional modes of representation in *Salaam Cinema*, of cinematic approaches intertwined with recent histories of social changes in Iran, departs from the ruins and rebellions of the troubled past. The practice of destabilisation of power is used, in order to reconfigure the oppressed past and to resist the danger that the truth may stay hidden. By avoiding uniform and linear movement in the narrative, other possible pasts and hidden aspects could emerge. For this reason, *Salaam Cinema*'s lack of written narrative, its lack of either a true or fictitious story that amuses, entertains and follows events sequentially to an end, is a crucial characteristic of the film. *Salaam Cinema* forms in fragments, in sets of various relations through numerous scenes. It may tell some tales at particular moments, but it anticipates no end to them.

A return to the conditions which produced current states of affairs helps to investigate further relations between the act of resistance and the creative act in the context of *Salaam Cinema*. Hence, the arrangement of historical events and the surreality of the film are in conjunction with one another. Following a multilayered hierarchical structure within society, the Islamic state began to borrow concepts and imagery from radicals and guerrilla movements, specially the Mojahedin[153] and political thinkers like Ali Shariati. Khomeini portrayed society in two distinctive and antagonistic classes: the oppressors (*Mostakberin*) and the oppressed (*Mostazafin*). The use of 'oppressed masses', altered from his pre-revolution speeches, was now assimilated from Shariati and his followers when he translated Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* as *Mostazafin-e Zamin*.[154] Nevertheless, strongly based on extremist Islamist ideology in practice, the state struggled for a just Islamic government and the picture of society was now one of "antagonistic dichotomy".[155]

Consequently, the state of affairs within which the changes to power relations took place in Iran in the late 1980s and early 1990s, caused not only a yearning for stability – particularly following the death of Ayatollah Khomeini – but were also strongly dependant on narratives and stories. The new supreme leader was selected on 4 June 1989, only one day after the Ayatollah's death. There was a conflict of opinion between fundamentalists and supporters of the new republic's members of parliament, as to who should be the next supreme leader; whether it should be an Assembly of Experts (Majles-e Khebregan-e Rahbari) or an

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[153] The guerrillas can be divided into five political groups: the Sazman-e Cherik-ha-ye Feda'-ye Khalq-e Iran (The Organisation of the Guerrilla Freedom Fighters of the Iranian People), known as the Marxist Fedayi; the Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran (The Organisation of the Freedom Fighters of the Iranian People) – generally referred to as the Islamic Mojahedin; the Marxist offshoot from the Sazman-e Mojahedin-e Khalq-e Iran. From 1975 to 1979, this organisation was known as the Marxist Mojahedin, Small Islamic organisations are often limited to one town, such as the Gorueh-e Abu Zahr (The Abu Zahr Group) in Nahavand; Small Marxist organisations, including independent groups, such as the Sazman-e Azadibakhsh-e Khalq-ha-ye Iran (The Organisation for the Liberation of the Iranian People). Abrahamina, E., Mar-Apr 1980, "The Guerrilla Movement in Iran", in MERIP Reports, No86, *The Left Forces in Iran,* Middle East Research and Information Project Publisher pp. 3–15, available at: https://mideast-africa.tau.ac.il/sites/humanities.tau.ac.il/files/media_server/mideast_africa/untitled%20folder/7.1.1.%20Guerilla%20Movement%20%5BAbrahamian%5D%20-%203-15.pdf.
[154] Abrahamina, E., 1993, *Khomeinism, Essays on the Islamic Republic*, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, p. 47.
[155] Ibid.p.48.

individual. Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the speaker of the parliament at the time, offered three narratives to the same 'truth'. That is, he claimed that Ali Khamenei must be the next supreme leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, based on some testimonies.[156]

The statements included two meetings between Rafsanjani and Ayatollah Khomeini, in which the conversations turned to concerns about the future of the Islamic state. On both occasions, Ayatollah comforted Rafsanji's worries, by saying that Ali Khamenei would be a perfect candidate. The third story quoted the older son of Ayatollah Khomeini, Ahmad, who reiterated the same concerns to Ayatollah, while they were watching a documentary film of Ali Khamenei's journey to North Korea and his meeting with Kim Il- Sung.[157] Rafsanji quotes Ahmad Khomeini's story as follows: 'While we were watching the footages, it was a decent scene, and I voiced [to my father] that, Mr Khamenei [being the president of the time] found a good position and has become the pride and honour for the system [the Islamic Republic regime]. He replied that he is truly worthy of leadership'.[158] It was immediately after sharing these testaments that Rafsanjani posed a question to all members of the parliament; that whomever agrees that Khamenei is an appropriate candidate to be the next supreme leader should stand up. With the support of the majority of the parliament's members, Khamenei was appointed as the next leader of the country.

Juxtaposition of the fragments of history and scenes of the film might not necessarily appear to be related to one another, but through undoing their combinations some kind of configurations could become accessible. Such a mode of undoing cannot approach the task of juxtaposition in uninterrupted or direct ways, as this would result in only one mass of information about the events that are all connected at one end. It is in this regard that the reading of *Salaam Cinema*, whether by crosscutting through the chaotic opening or via investigating the practice of power, has to be via collapsing the events of the film into various narrations. Placing these affairs and their complex relations into historical and political contexts is made possible because of the investigative method of Makhmalbaf and his participatory approach. It is in this way that a reconfiguration of histories from these juxtaposed contexts is possible. This is, therefore, not a method of communication of

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[156] "After the Islamic Republic of Iran was established in 1979, researchers and intellectuals in sociopolitical studies began to pay more attention to different aspects of these fields and their roles in managing the government and the society. However, the
conditions imposed on the country during the first years after the revolution and the beginning of the imposed war ruined any chance of extensive theoretical and practical researches. In July 1983, the Assembly of Experts for Leadership was established to act as an undoubtedly important organ of the Islamic government against attacks of the enemies of the Islamic state." Excerpt from the Assembly of Experts' website's preface, available at:
http://www.majlesekhobregan.ir/en/ashnayibamajlesView.html?ItemID=3307, accessed on: 15 October 2015.
[157] Kim Il-Sung (15 April 1912 People's Republic of Korea (2–8 July 1994) was the supreme leader of the Democratic DPRK) from its establishment in 1948 to his death in 1994, Sommerlad, J., 7 September 2018, "North Korea at 70: How the personality cult of Kim Il-sung shaped a nation", available at: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/north-korea-70th-anniversary-kim-il-sung-personality-cult-history-a8527696.html, accessed on 15 September 2018.
[158] Transcription from the documentation of the event in which the Assembly of Experts rejected the Leadership council and appointed Khamanei after Rafsanjani's speech, available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=atlEUNRu1Mc, accessed 25 October 2015.

information and knowledge per se, but rather a counter-relation to the sets of affairs inhabiting them.

3.6. A Real/Filmic Event

Salaam Cinema, 1995, photos by Jamshid Bayrami. Available at http://makhmalbaf.com/?q=Photo- Gallery/salaam-cinema-photo-gallery, accessed on: 14 June 2015.

Each scene reflects diverse aspects of the condition of society and reconfigures certain histories with people. While understanding the power of people when generating art with society, in *Salaam Cinema* the border between real and filmic events to some extent becomes indistinguishable. In another scene, a young woman amongst the participants requests a more private conversation with Makhmalbaf as at that time she does not know that the recordings might be part of the final film. She approaches the director's desk while keeping her voice down and shares her personal story. That is, she wants to join her fiancé in Europe, who has fled Iran a year ago because of some problems that we could not know. To succeed in the visa process, an international film festival seemed like a great opportunity for her to join him, thus she has been taking part in acting schools preparing for almost one year. Therefore, she is demanding a role in the upcoming movie for which the audition is taking place in order to obtain a visa and be able to leave Iran.

Expanding the concerns of presented instances onto the larger scope of Iran's modern history, yet another possibility to unpack social conditions and historical development of the post-revolution state is created. Iran's migration history, in the first decade of the Islamic Republic, shows an extreme increase in the number of simultaneous emigration and immigration. From over 67,000 Iranians leaving the country between 1971 and 1980, the number grows to over 280,000 by the end of 1990.[159] The history of immigration prior to the

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[159] Dana, L.P., ed., 2007, *Handbook of Research on Ethnic Minority Entrepreneurship, A Co-evolutionary View on Resource Management,* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, pp. 228–229.

revolution, dating back to mid-1950s, was first shaped by the Western-oriented elite, then expanded to the educated middle-class as well as more politically affected minorities such as Baha'is, Jews, Armenians and Assyrians.[160] Eventually, another phase of immigration in the post-revolutionary era was caused by other motivations that were influenced by social implications at large. War, Islamisation of universities as well as private and governmental offices and corporations, organised murders and disappearances of intellectuals and activists, and decreased educational possibilities are amongst some of those factors.

However, from another perspective, the social and cultural changes taking place in Iran from the late 1980s, of which so many are influenced by political and economic changes, contrast with the often-negative image of the post-revolutionary era. The life of rural populations improved through technology, and health care and education expanded in general for both genders across the country. Community based practices were organised to engage with the improvement of the rural places. For instance, the 'Reconstructed Jihad (*jahad-e sazandegi*) began as a movement of volunteers to help with the 1979 harvest but soon took on a broader, more official role and carried out, with the help of local populations, programmes that included road building, piped water, electrification, clinics, schools, and irrigation canals.[161]

Moreover, the rapid growth of female education and urbanisation as well as improvement of women's causes gave women more confidence and strengthened their voice. The art and cultural field is not exempt from social change and the consciousness of social injustice towards women is not a secret. Shaqayeq, the young woman who seeks Makhmalbaf for a part in his movie in the hope that she can attend an international film festival and eventually obtain a visa to meet her fiancé, in the following year plays an important role in another movie, *Gabeh* (1996, Mohsen Makhmalbaf), which was selected for both the Cannes Film Festival (1996) and the Academy Awards (1998).

Salaam Cinema engages with a critical reading of cinema liberated from the formal order of narrated images into an assemblage of seemingly unrelated events. On the one hand, the interrupted histories as a result of resistance against cultural suppressions and regulations, and on the other hand, working with limited possibilities for collective formation of cultural and artistic projects to imagine how the future can be, turn *Salaam Cinema* into a form of socially-engaged project. Throughout *Salaam Cinema*, a particular approach to the counter-relation between the filmic event and the real state of affairs is at play. *Salaam Cinema* operates as a sociocultural event, undoing the relation between states of affairs both intrinsically and extrinsically. Not only does it produce new relations and encounters between

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[160] Hakimzadeh, Sh., 2006, "Iran: A Vast Diaspora Abroad and Millions of Refugees at Home", available at: https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/iran-vast-diaspora-abroad-and-millions-refugees-home, accessed on: September 2015.

[161] Keddie, N., R., 2006, *Modern Iran, Roots and Results of Revolution,* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, p.286.

the participants in an experience of the cinematic; it also expands to other sets of relations, so that the concealed power is rendered visible.

As Dabashi states, '*Salaam Cinema* is a historic document about the significance of cinema in contemporary Iran and the strange effect that it has on a people at large'.[233] *Salaam Cinema* not only challenges its participants and the conditions in which they perform, but also confronts its own field of production. The post-revolutionary Iranian cinema, explicitly declared a considerable interest in the human condition. In this sense, Makhmalbaf's films, including *Nassereddin Shah, Actor-e Cinema* (Once Upon a Time, Cinema, 1992), *Honarpisheh* (The Actor, 1993) and *Nun-O-Goldoon* (A Moment of Innocence, 1996), explore the state of cinema, with its possibilities and impossibilities. As Eric Egan writes, 'In these films and particularly *Salaam Cinema* and the *Moment of Innocence*, we see the full realisation of the dialectic of cinema and Iran positioned as lenses in a state of constant reflection'.[206] From this perspective, films such as Abbas Kiarostami's *Close Up* (1990) and *Zir-e Derakhtane Zeytoun* (Under the Olive Trees, 1994), one way or another, explore the cinematic nature of cinema and its relation to the human condition.

My focus on *Salaam Cinema* relates the possibility of a counter-relation with the era of conflict and war in Iran as well as the social and cultural turns. The film makes a perceptible link to the representation of its political circumstances and moves towards a practice of mediating a social and ethical reflection upon those circumstances. In doing so, it challenges what could become a moral imagination for the practice of resistance. I argue and explore how *Salaam Cinema*, from a curatorial perspective, provides possibilities to reconfigure the recent histories of the social and political conditions in which it has been produced. In this way, it could be read as a critical vehicle for the representation of the social and its traumatic post-war/post-revolution condition in a creatively experimental and documentary form.

Through metaphorical exchanges, *Salaam Cinema* offer possibilities to reflect on the political and social conditions of the time both from the point of view of national affairs and the post-war era in the geopolitical state. In this sense, Egan writes, 'Cinema as a mode of cultural expression acts as both a product and document of a society'.[162] *Salaam Cinema* is a 'product' in the sense of an artistic production that enters international and local film festivals as well receiving popular distribution across the country. Besides, as a creative act it also offers a process that takes place in the making of the film as a social event and occurs in conjunction with real forms of sociality with thousands of participating audiences. Therefore, it is also a 'document' in its encounter with participants and practice of social engagements through which social realities and critical modalities are formed.

Consequently, the making of the film performs beyond a mere documentation, or specific methodology. In view of curatorial ability, a counter-relation to current states of affairs

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[162] Egan. E., 2005, *The Films of Makhmalbaf, Cinema, Politics & Culture in Iran*, Washington DC: Mage Publishers, p. 15.

provides different possibilities for unfolding certain historical events as a representational exchange. The 'curatorial-ability' of 'inhabiting states of affairs' makes possible the critical reconfiguration of such influences on cultural and artistic productions as well as new experiences of social change. As mentioned earlier, the death of Ayatollah Khomeini, appointing a new leader, formation of new cultural policies and emergence of new social realties were all crucial points in the study of power and transformation of the state. Disassociation with the linear historical method renders unknowns out of a polluted and tainted situation. Therefore, there is the possibility of viewing from different angles, of accessing the truth while reconfiguring the relations differently.

CONCLUSION

A series of research questions were outlined at the start of this thesis with the intention to address some particular concerns related to curatorial discourse such as the forms of mutual recognition, social interactions and collective knowledge that curatorial practice can produce. In order to approach both the research questions and the objectives of this research stated in the INTRODUCTION, I claim that my approach to the field of curatorial practice has been original in three ways. Firstly, as current discussions' focal point primarily is on the authorial modification generated by the activities of curators whether independently or through institutions, the way in which I have given most of the attention of this research to 'potentials of the curatorial' offers a different lens through which to position the history of curatorial thinking. Secondly, I have proposed the notion of 'curatorial-ability' and analysed three major qualities, which allowed me to expand curatorial practice into creative processes and be able to examine diverse types of case studies. Lastly, I manifested a unique combination of investigational research upon selected case studies and a self-motivated collaborative practice-based curatorial project (*Curatorial, in Other Words*) in parallel with a theoretical and educational process of defining, translating and exploring abilities of 'environmenting', 'improvising', and 'inhabiting states of affairs'.

This research-based curatorial practice, *Curatorial, in Other Words,* shaped three projects echoing the potentials of the curatorial discussed in the thesis including an educational course (Charsoo-Honar, December 2015 – November 2016), a research-based exhibition (*Trans-Transfiguration, Sheikh Safi's Anecdote and Any Expandable Thing,* Lajevardi Foundation, May-July 2017) and a symposium (*Tehran Curatorial Symposium #1*, 26-30 May 2017), which is the first example of a year-long pedagogical curatorial programme in Tehran where this practice took place. Also, a publication is in progress that compiles a selection of essays and articles presented and analysed during the educational course and the symposium to be launched in 2019. All of these activities contribute to the expansion of knowledge in the field and are best recognised as an ongoing response to a series of questions on 'curatorial-abilities' rather than a fixed, fully realised outcome. As a result of such methodology, the second edition of the symposium, *Tehran Curatorial Symposium #2*, will take place in January 2019 in collaboration with Charsoo Honar, titled *Curator as Translator.*

Curatorial practice during the past two decades turned to a new path in the contemporary art field, and the roles of curators expanded from organising art exhibitions and caring for artists or collections to more complicated and demanding roles being responsible for collection display, commissions, live performances, film screenings, developing social activities and public programmes, development of policies, coordination and planning, delivery and monitoring the distribution of the programmes, curating art-led and community-led projects,

managing the budget, writing reports, drafting fundraising applications, designing market material, and liaising with external organisations to name some of the professional aspects of curating. In other words, a broad outline of the field of curating could describe it as incorporating sets of rules and relations between subjects and objects, as well as suggesting operations and activities within a disciplinary mode that indicates some sort of representational format, offering an intricate exhibition-making as well as possibilities for cognitive fulfilment. By re-visiting historical instances and critical assessments, I have tried to understand how curatorial acts make up a self-reflexive process that can be realised in a more creative capacity.

The history of curating and the culture of the curatorial cannot be separated. That which has been produced within the field, particularly during the past few decades, has considerably expanded the philological and historical practices of curating and is preserved linguistically and visually within independent projects, engaged institutional programmes and various forms of collaboration. Through the study of collected knowledge and shared experiences, not only in a historical overview and a philological approach but also with a critical analysis in this thesis, I aimed to re-read concealed potentialities of the curatorial and examine the ways in which such potentials could be realised in our contemporary curating. By problematising the conventional history of curating, this research provides a fresh contextualisation of the field of curatorial.

In connection with the desire to study potentials with which to create forms of social change through curatorial practices and educational endeavours, this doctoral project was guided with philosophies from Giorgio Agamben (on potentiality) and Jean-Luc Nancy (on community). The consequences can be found in search of a curatorial turn in artistic practices and expanded into curatorial as creative acts. Furthermore, through critical thinking and analysis from Grant Kester on conversational and mutual practices, Fred Moten on improvisation, and Massimo De Angelis on the notion of "common", certain aspects of 'curatorial-abilities' were discussed and explored in this research. To view curatorial acts as collective apparatuses that make it possible to create situations for mutual recognition and social engagements, new perspectives on art and creative fields could be translated into the public domains and in different contexts. Through suggested conceptions and linguistic analysis of the potentials of curatorial, I hope to have described this mode of practice and its abilities as a socially engaged activity that needs to be revisited in collaborative formats and to be addressed while resisting certain political agendas within the contemporary field of art.

Analysing 'curatorial-abilities', not only in the exhibitionary formats but also in the non-exhibitionary modes of representation discussed in the first chapter, expanded the field of my investigation to encompass that which happened before and that which came after the event of curating itself, which allowed for the coappearance of various components within the situation of the curatorial act. The ability of 'environmenting' helped to reassess the institutional possibilities and to share the notion of social in a mutual format. This was

discussed through social-oriented practices that suggested new dimensions to the problems that are recognised and explored with those who coappear in the shared environments.

Alteration of operating systems in the hope of expanding spaces of mutual recognition is a curatorial moment exemplified in the problems of immigrants, as seen in Bruguera's work. The curated environment provides possibilities for a mutual recognition between immigrants, artists and other participants, creating a double role for the immigrants as both the subject and the player of the act. Moreover, pursuing sustainability or adapting to changing conditions must be considered as part of a long-term practice and as on-going commitments. With this in mind, the research-based curatorial practice undertaken for this thesis developed a continuing project that is based on a collaborative and self-reflexive format.

My account of the ability of 'improvising' speculated on the exigency of states of time in bringing together cooperational modes within disrupted times. As analysed in Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri's practice, the educational aspect of this 'curatorial-ability' operates within the relationship between existing knowledge and improvised actions. By posing the question of how to become subject to one's own act, the ability of 'improvising' was analysed as a method of both surviving and sustaining, not through sequential times but through disrupted times. In this regard, 'improvising' challenges the possibilities of reproducing existing knowledge in the hope of rethinking the struggle of the common(s).

Through a series of metaphorical exchanges and historical contexts, the third ability was discussed in this thesis as a form of productive resistance. The possibilities for production of art as well as the spaces for representation of art are rooted in an expansive context of social and political affairs that not only relate to different historical narrations but also are illustrative of particular power relations. To explore the processes that have interrupted or neglected the historical narratives and have put them at risk of being appropriated as a result of political influences, "inhabiting states of affairs" was proposed as a form of action to resist interrupted histories and reproduce them with the power of people.

To elaborate on the characteristics of each of the abilities discussed in this research, I have analysed them separately and on specific practices. Nonetheless, it is almost impossible to draw clear boundaries between the ways these abilities are operating. Nearly all of the examples I have explored perform as if the three abilities are intermingling, yet one has a stronger presence in the practice. For instance, in Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri's work, which was discussed in the second chapter to study its improvising ability, the created situation and the spaces of representation throughout their project were driven by what I call the ability of 'environmenting' that was analysed in the first chapter. Another example is Tania Bruguera's *IM International*, and indeed the ability of 'environmenting' is traceable to her

work. Nonetheless, aspects of both abilities of 'improvising' and 'inhabiting states of affairs', could be analysed in her work.

This research was pursued to make known the importance of curatorial acts within contemporary art. The research was not limited to certain agencies of curators or artists; it was done unconditionally and in the study of its abilities. The complexity of the curatorial act and the density and complications within the ground on which curatorial is practiced could offer even more potential and greater inquiries to be explored. This research project came together not to create a "science of curatorial practices" nor to prescribe lists of abilities with which the practice of curating could perform. On the contrary, by exploring the possibilities and potentialities that this mode of practice can offer, I hope to contribute and envisage the emergence of a new discourse for curatorial activities. Through conjoining cultural, historical, theoretical, critical and political potentials in the complexity of art today, the inevitable question is how to do things curatorially.

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APPENDICES

Introduction

This Appendix serves as a documentation of a research-based practice titled *Curatorial, in Other Words* that was undertaken as a part of this thesis. The following sections provide a contextualisation of the ways in which this multi-layered and complex practice was initiated and formed. It will also provide some critical analysis of different phases through which this practice was developed into an ongoing project. *Curatorial, in Other Words* is the first research-based curatorial study programme in Tehran, initiated by myself with the aim of fundamentally expanding curatorial processes through a model of self-reflexive but collaborative projects in my hometown: Tehran. The first edition of this project comprised a pedagogical course, an exhibition, and a symposium, and is expanding into a publication.

This process was formed through conversations, fundraising, meetings, and programming, and it was delivered via lectures, workshops, seminars, think tanks, reading groups, translations, editing work, selections, writings, designs, interviews, and trips. *Curatorial, in Other Words* was born in collaboration with Charsoo Honar, an artist-run pedagogical institution in Tehran, under the Rahi Tazeh (A New Path) programme, and was funded through crowdfunding and sponsorships from Charsoo Honar and Lajevardi Foundation as well as a grant that was provided by the MOP Foundation.

The Introduction provides a socio-political context outlining the institutional structure on which the whole project operated, while delivering historical background on the post-revolution condition of cultural practices in Iran. Different types of audiences attended and participated in various phases of the project that is analysed and described in the subsequent section. APPENDIX A, APPENDIX C, and APPENDIX D present the three major parts of the project that are described and analysed: the educational course, the exhibition, and the symposium. Appendix B presents a list of weekly sessions held in the educational course, including the essays and publications that were referred to, analysed, and/or studied in each session.

APPENDIX D gives a full description of the artworks, documenting the research and archival material presented at the exhibition. The subsequent section describes the upcoming publication in conjunction with *Curatorial, in Other Words* that is still under development and is planned to be launched in 2019 during the second edition of the symposium. The last appendices, F and G, provide a copy of the poster used for the public announcement, for which 1000 printed copies were distributed across art spaces, galleries, universities, and art foundations in Tehran, as well as a list of links to online media coverage about some of the events that took place during this project.

Background

Motivated by a need to understand the abilities of curatorial practice in local contexts, I started a collaborative project with a Tehran-based independent institution, Charsoo Honar, in December 2015. Charsoo Honar is an independent cultural and educational institution in Tehran that started its activities in 1996 when it was co-founded by Dr Behrouz Najafian and Saeed Ravanbakhsh. Registered as an art institution, Charsoo started by offering various art-related courses on pre-university exams for young adults. Running various lectures and workshops in drawing, painting, photography, sculpting, printmaking, music, and film-making as well as theory-based lectures in the history of art, theory, and philosophy of art, Charsoo Honar soon became a hub for young and emerging artists and curators in Tehran.

Because of the political atmosphere created by mass demonstrations in 2009 following the Iranian presidential election, the new government introduced new policies to educational and cultural sectors. As a result, a considerable number of the lecturers left or were forced to resign from the universities. This change of climate in academia forced several lecturers and professors to take refuge in some independent institutions like Charsoo Honar to avoid the pressure that was put on them by the governmental bodies. Privately funded institutions turned into important places by providing educational courses outside the systematic organisation of the universities. Consequently, numerous lectures, workshops, think tanks, and conferences were formed in new and independent spaces, including galleries, while creating a different audience and expanding the possibility of discursive and artistic change.
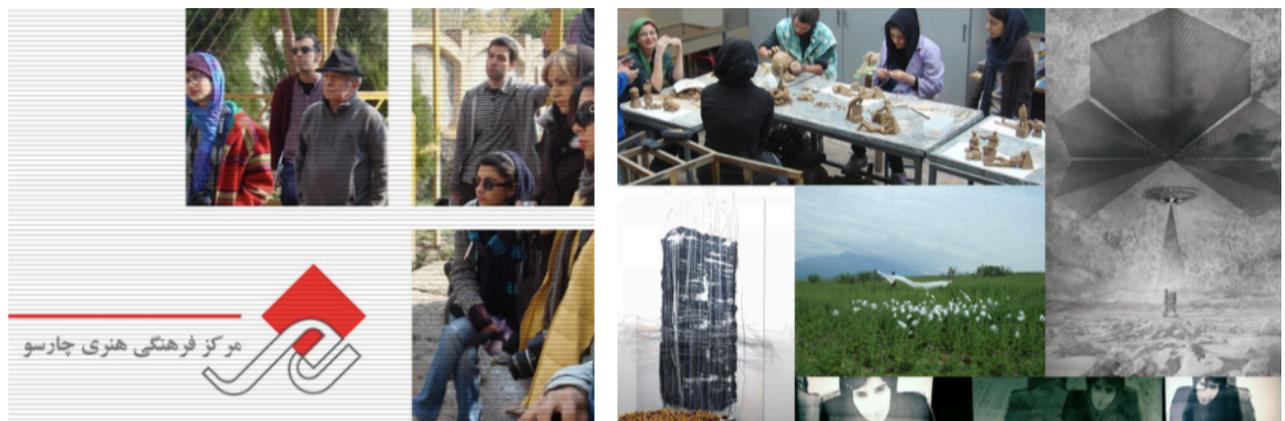
Reflecting such changes within the educational and cultural environment, a new programme titled Rahi Taze (A New Path) was launched at Charsoo with the aim of accumulating efforts

and endeavours of individual scholars and reflecting on the contemporary condition for artistic productions. Subsequently, I received an invitation from Charsoo to collaborate on the organisation of an educational course on curatorial studies. Through this platform, I aimed to explore the curatorial abilities with which I could not only deliver a possibility for translation and production of some critical literature about the discourse but also identify an audience with whom the relevance of such literature could be reconfigured in that specific context. By inviting scholars and academicians whose works are addressing some of the contemporary issues and concerns about and related to the curatorial field, Tehran became a place to discuss alternative approaches. Accordingly, the exhibition and symposium were formed to reflect on similar issues in different formats.

The Structure

The pedagogical course on curatorial studies in Tehran started in the form of a collaboration with Charsoo Honar in December 2015. This initiative was developed into a multidimensional and ongoing project titled Curatorial in Other Words, which later expanded into different forms of exhibition making, symposium, and publication. Exploring power relations in the domain of art and engaging in critical strategies which could help to recognise the potentials of curatorial practice, this project was formed with a self-reflexive approach. Thus, to create a generative ground for critical studies within a newly established place, and to recognise the emergence of a new form of audience, I developed *Curatorial, in Other Words* in a collaborative format, and since its inception I have designed, organised, and curated this project through the following phases:

1) An educational and research-based course on curatorial practice that explored different issues on the contemporary condition of curating. Subject matter such as presentation, the educational urgency, and the production of knowledge as well as archiving, documenting, and recording and their relation to the practice of curating were explored throughout the year.
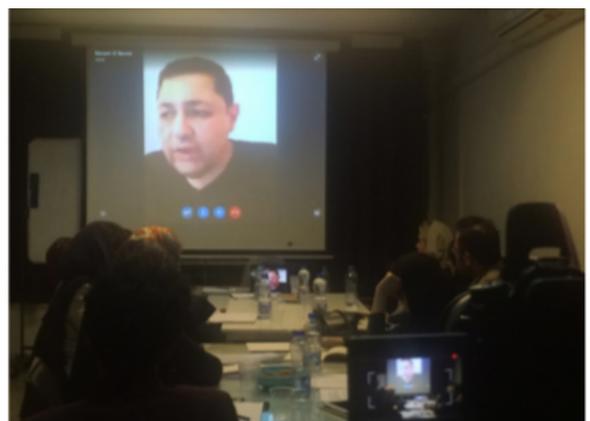
2) A research-based exhibition, titled *Trans-Transfiguration: Sheikh Saafi's Anecdote and Any Expandable Thing*, was held from May to July 2017 at the Lajevardi Foundation. Unfolding onto various fields and suggesting new approaches to the assemblages of artistic, institutional, and organised operations, I curated this exhibition in a collective mode and delivered it in two interrelated parts. A selection of artworks was arranged by the ways in which "Farsh" (carpet) and/or any expandable forms/concepts have been challenged, deconstructed, or reproduced as alternative possibilities. Also, with the help of some of the participating students in the educational course, a combination of collected, archival, and documented material which contextualised the subject matter was presented in the exhibition visually, orally, and textually.

3) The Tehran Curatorial Symposium, on 26 and 27 May 2017, presented a series of lectures and panel discussions by various curators and theorists from Bangkok, Helsinki, Glasgow, London, Nottingham, Tehran, and Toronto. The lecturers were invited to address some of the practical, theoretical, and philosophical issues relating to their curatorial practice or field of research and to discuss its mechanisms and methods of operation within and outside institutions in different contexts. By doing so, some critical questions on the potentials of curatorial practice in conjunction with the current exhibition-making models and non-exhibitionary formats were addressed.

The Participating Audience

The project was designed to address mostly art communities, including artists, curators, critics, art directors, and cultural agents. The first group of students who took part in the educational course, who ranged from twenty-five to fifty-five years of age, included artists, researchers, curators, and academicians. In the first semester, almost twenty students registered and attended the lectures. But in each successive term this number gradually reduced to seven at the last semester. Curatorship seemed to have had great associations with exhibition-making skills, but there was not as much interest in the theory of curating or the study of the potentials of curatorial practice. Although exhibition making is in fact the most appreciated aspect of curatorial practice, this educational project was designed and introduced as a research-based course on curatorial studies and its potentials. As a result, with the remaining participants the practice part of the project, a research-based exhibition, was collectively undertaken with some of the students under my supervision.

Krzysztof Wodiczko, in his essay titled "Inner Public" (Field: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism, Spring 2015) a series of social and collaborative relationships that evolve to produce an "inner public" in his projects. In a similar way, the initial participants in the educational course turned into a collective curatorial team, taking up different parts of the process of forming a new public inside the project. This included working on the research and gathering material for the exhibition, taking part in the think-tank sessions, and putting forward proposals for the selection of the artworks and/or books and videos, as well as taking up fieldwork projects and interviews that were later presented in the exhibition. The visitors were encouraged to interact with some of the works. Furthermore, the suggested settings to view the works offered different possibilities for the postures in which the bodies could relate to the work.

The participating audience at the symposium included different networks of people. On the one hand, the lecturers who presented both in the educational course, either in person or via online video calls, and at the symposium would turn into informed interlocutors during the talks and discussions. Through the involvement of different publics, generative environments were created to develop the project and produce possibilities for mutual recognition. On the other hand, those who attended the seminars included some of the students from the educational course and some directors of not very well-known galleries that are operating under the municipality's cultural programme. Furthermore, as part of the symposium a series of panel discussions was conducted; these were moderated by local practitioners to discuss the mechanisms and methods of curatorial practice in Tehran with a view toward describing their own experiences.

APPENDIX A: THE EDUCATIONAL COURSE

December 2015–November 2016 Charsoo-Honar, Tehran

As I discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the 'curatorial-ability' of 'environmenting' is one by which spaces of representation and sites of social engagement can be transformed into new sets of artistic and collective operations. I designed a pedagogical course for the first phase of *Curatorial, in Other Words* through which lectures turned into research labs involving dialogical practices and collective transliteral works. Outlined in four semesters, some aspects of curatorial practice, which in my view were essential to understand the potentials of curatorship in the contemporary art field, were explored, critically analysed, and discussed in relation to the context of Tehran. This section presents an overview of the lectures and organised workshops, as well as the literature that was translated and analysed throughout the course partially by myself and partially by the participating scholars and academicians.

Appendix A1: Which Context?

The first term, titled Which Context? encompassed an introduction to the recent history of curating with a view to a contemporary approach of exhibition making as well as critical study of curating from a global perspective and large-scale exhibitions and their effects on local art. To understand the initial characteristics with which curatorial practice could be identified in its new capacities, the first course was designed on shifting moments in the contemporary history of curating. While mapping a terrain for curatorial capacities in the context of Tehran, I included some seminars run by myself to elaborate on the potentials of curating and to address different issues around the practice of exhibition making and curatorship in Tehran. I also invited some curators and researchers to present their concerns, arguments, and ideas on the developing field of curatorial practice and its problematics. Furthermore, a historical foundation for curatorial practice in the contemporary domain of art was studied and explored in the discussions and seminars. Such a structure allowed for juxtaposition of knowledge and practical aspects of the curatorial field from local to global scales and vice versa.

It is important to mention that the cultural policy during the 1970s in Iran stressed the importance of disseminating a culture based on national heritage and establishing the responsibilities of public authorities. Although such development pursued the aim of neither blindly imitating Western civilization and culture nor rejecting them, adopting the two while using Western models seemed to be a not very successful strategy. Large-scale and governmentally sponsored art institutions prior to the Iranian Cultural Revolution in the 1980s were accessible only by the elite and certain classes of society. After the revolution, the relation of knowledge and power created by institutional and infrastructural developments affected the art and cultural domain in different ways.

The cultural policy with a view to the Islamisation of universities and institutions resulted either in the closure of many places or the implementation of new programmes instead. The art field faced a considerable transformation in terms of the exhibition of art for different classes of audience and the accessibility of art for the public. Private galleries and artist-run spaces faced difficulties in organising exhibitions and curating events to communicate with the post-revolutionary audience. To reflect on such historical developments and address the contemporary connotations of such changes, a Foucauldian perspective on the institutional creation of knowledge/power and the institution of exhibition formed the initial discussions in the first semester.

By the time of Mohammad Khatami's presidency (1977–2005), the easing of censorship and the
expansion of many arts, especially cinema, was encouraged. After 2000 and under the new policy that was more liberal and in support of the freedom of speech, many bans on films and publications were lifted, new galleries and art spaces started to flourish, and art universities introduced new curriculums for contemporary subjects. The change of condition created a shift within the cultural policy and further possibilities inside existing and newly established art institutions. Therefore, a selection of essays and articles was studied, while individual scholars presented lectures that discussed similarities and differences of curatorial strategies and their effects in various contexts.

Correspondingly, Bassam El Baroni (co-founder and director of the Alexandria Contemporary Arts Forum) was invited to present a paper on "Curatorial and Abstraction from Pre-Crisis to Post-Crisis Globalisation", discussing the international institutionalisation process that has created a gap between contemporary art and the art field. Thus, the pedagogical shift within the curatorial field, in his argument, creates a culture of abstraction that needs new modalities. Moreover, critical analysis on curatorial practice as a form of resistance in the globalised condition and the role of biennale and large-scale exhibitions was the core argument in a lecture given by Viviana Checchia (public engagement curator at the Centre for Contemporary Art Glasgow). Also, a non-profit model of art spaces during the 1960s and 1970s in Iran was explored in a lecture given by Eham Pouriamehr (independent curator and writer), to understand the context from which contemporary turns have taken place.

Appendix A2: Presentation/Representation/Representative

As analysed by Stuart Hall based on a Foucauldian reading, representation can be explored as a "signifying practice in a rich diversity of social contexts and institutional sites." The visual productions of media in creating certain fabrications of identities, race, and sexuality take place through certain forms of representation. In the same fashion, exhibitions, presentation of artworks, curated events, and the coming together of people can have different meanings from the knowledges that are constructed in them to the culture that is being reproduced by them. Correspondingly, in the second term the discussions of curatorial practice were followed by questions on the notion and politics of representation, as well as the various forms it could take in the practice of curating.

Using the same method of combined lectures, seminars, and reading groups, the question of representation in relation to the implications of power was explored in regards to institutional power and the limits of independent organisations via the study of self-reflexive practices. Moreover, the relation between the genealogy of curating and modern subjectivity, as well as the power structures and representation of the self in different environments, were explored and discussed. Some lectures included presentations by Carolina Rito, head of Public Programme and Research at Nottingham Contemporary; Jiyoon Moon, curator at Korean Cultural Centre UK; Mahtab Mazlouman, architect and scenographer, and lecturer at La Villette and Sorbonne University, Paris; and Vipash Purichanont, lecturer on museum and art gallery, at Silpakorn University, Bangkok.
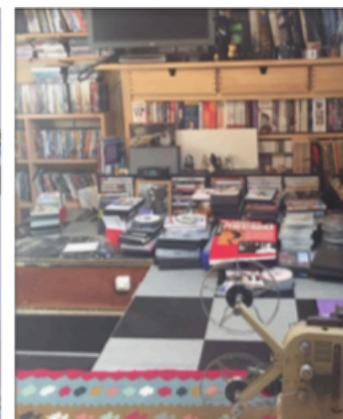
Appendix A3: Educational Urgency; Curating and the Production of Knowledge

Questions such as how exhibition making could operate as a method of experimenting and researching, or how curatorial practice can turn into a site for knowledge production, shaped the main direction of further studies in the third semester. Keeping these queries in mind, a turn from curating as practice to curating as a discourse seemed inevitable. Through discursive and conversational models of exhibition making, the capacity of curatorial practice extended into a potential space for critique. Starting from a local practice to initiate mapping a terrain for contemporary curating in Iran, different practices with possibilities of knowledge production were analysed. For instance, Hamid Severi presented a lecture on two projects, titled Persian Visions: Contemporary Photography from Iran and In-Betweenness, that were curated in collaboration with a private and a governmental institution, respectively. At each instance Severi presented some aspects of the groundwork for exhibition making concerning not only the selection of works and artists but also the textual material for public distribution and the institutional policies to follow. All of these can have direct impact on the sorts of knowledges that are produced during and after the event of exhibition.

Furthermore, the critical study of curatorial practice generates knowledge and eventually expands the discourse of curating within academia both theoretically and practically. Such critiques and analyses rely heavily on first-person narratives and curators' own creative mind for articulation of their practice. "'Doing It'—Considering Curating as a Peripatetic Practice" was the title of a lecture/workshop set and presented by Mika Savela and Henrik Drufva, who proposed the idea of publication as a form of knowledge production through using curatorial methods. Not only because of the content but also by studying various elements of which a publication is formed, certain knowledges could be configured. At the workshop, by looking at an exhibition catalogue, brochure, public announcement invitations, and published materials that are distributed in conjunction with an exhibition or an art event, a possibility for research and intervention in some social and political relations in Tehran was created. To do so, participants were asked to bring to the workshop a selection of published material including brochures and catalogues produced in conjunction with several exhibitions in Tehran, which were examined and analysed in a conversational format.

Appendix A4: Archiving, Documenting, Recording

The contemporary history of the Middle East includes various sorts of state violence that has threatened or abolished many archives, violations of art and cultural sites, and violation of human rights and social laws. More than ever before, this urges curatorial strategies to be concerned with archival material and the practice of documenting, not only in terms of preserving but also in making art alive and visible. Hence the last term investigated both working with archives and producing archives through curatorial practice. Archiving was studied as a possibility to intervene and re-read histories and reproduce knowledges that were realised through those histories into new contexts.

Multidisciplinary and research-based practices and new artistic strategies obtain various techniques in working with archives to render visible different parts of the history on which their queries are being investigated. Through the study of various systems, I tried to understand the expansion of operation of archival material and documentation in the curatorial field, including:

1. Documentation of art festivals and large-scale exhibitions
2. Film archive and the history of cinema
3. Archiving as an artistic gesture
4. Philosophy of archive

For example, Lara Baladi's essay on "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance" was studied in its curatorial capacity. As an interdisciplinary artist, Baladi works with archive and documents her subject matter through photographing different parts of the city of Cairo at the time of the Arab Spring that took place in Tahrir Square and the surrounding spaces in January 2011. Occupied by a large number of demonstrators, the streets and alleys turned into a different space, and traces of such changes are documented in Baladi's photographs. The ways in which she combines her art practice with curatorial methods could be traced in terms of selecting, researching, archiving, editing, and presenting.

Furthermore, to depart from the archives as merely knowable content or material for cultural translations, a more critical approach seemed important. Correspondingly, Archive Troubles was a lecture by Stefan Nowotny that engaged with a series of theoretical implications of the notion of archive, exploring how to counter the limitations of a given archive and study the way it performs "a regulatory function around what we can or cannot know—or say".

In this semester the students were also encouraged to work together in a practice of organising and curating an exhibition in a collective manner, working with research methods and archival material. In doing so they were combining theories and thoughts into different forms of representation. This exhibition is presented in more detail and discussed in its curatorial approach in Appendix C.

APPENDIX B: COMPLETE LIST OF LECTURES

Appendix B1: Term 1

Week 1: Introduction and Contextualisation
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Exhibitionary Complex" by Tony Bennett, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 2: Art, "The Curatorial and Abstraction from Pre-Crisis to Post-Crisis Globalization", lecture by Bassam El Baroni

Week 3: "The Biennale and Large-Scale Exhibitions as Global and Local Formats", lecture by Viviana Checchia, reading excerpts from "Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History 1962–2002" by Bruce Altshuler, "Access to the Mainstream" by Luis Camnitzer, and "Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition" by Tim Griffin

Week 4: A Brief History of Curating
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Shifting the Exhibitionary Complex" by Terry Smith, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 5: Curating and Mediating
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Crisis as Form, Curating and the Logic of Mediation" by Helmut Drexler, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 6: "The Discourse of Curating in Iran's Art Institutions During the 1960s", lecture by Elham Pouriamehr Reading excerpts from Contemporary Iranian Art: New Perspectives, by Hamid Keshmirshekan

Week 7: Curating and the Condition of Art
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Turn from the Turns: An Avant-Garde Moving Out of the Centre (1986–93)", by Helmut Drexler

Week 8: The Notion of the Curatorial
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Curating/Curatorial A Conversation Between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice by Beatrice von Bismarck", Jörn Schafaff, Thomas Weski (eds.)

Appendix B2: Term 2

Week 1: Interrupting the Exhibition
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "What Comes After the Show? On Post-Representational Curating", by Nora Sternfeld and Luisa Ziaja, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 2: "Exposed 'Gazes'—Representation in the Expanded Field of Exhibition-Making", lecture by Carolina Rito

Week 3: Different Forms of Representation
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Representation & the Media, Featuring Stuart Hall", Compiled by Sut Jhally (ed.), lecture by Fereshte Moosavi Week 4: Representation and Visual Culture

Week 4: Representation and Visual Culture
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Representation, Meaning and Language", by Stuart Hall, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 5: Scenography in the Museum and Exhibition, lecture by Mahtab Mazlouman in conversation with Fereshte Moosavi
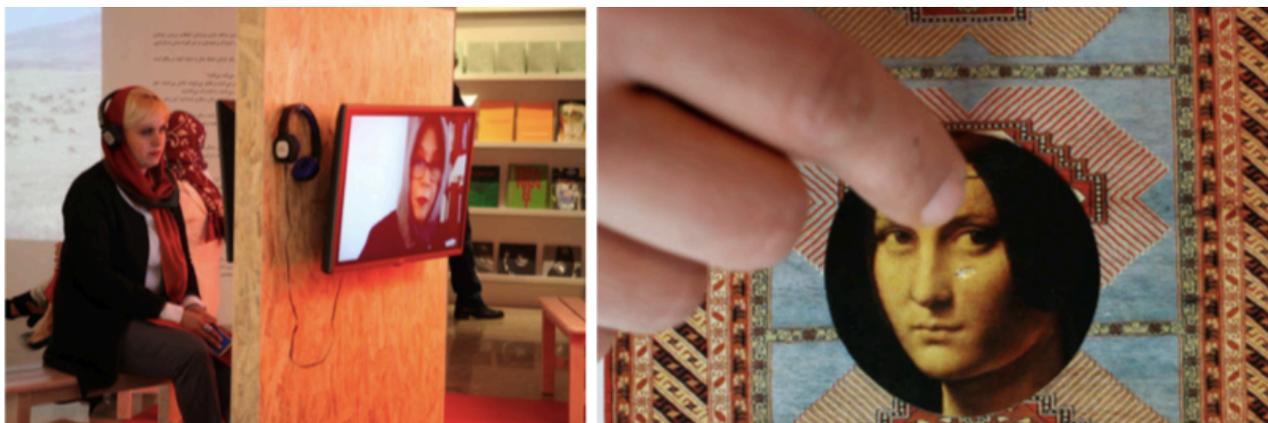
Week 6: "What Would It Mean for Choreography to Perform as an Exhibition?", lecture by Ji-Yun Moon Reading excerpts from "Positively White Cube Revisited", by Simon Sheikh

Week 7: "Exhibiting Subjectivity: Curating as a Representational Practice", lecture by Vipash Purichanont Reading excerpts from "The Age of the World Picture", by Martin Heidegger, and "Affluence and Choice, The Social Significance of the Curatorial", by Dorothea von Hantelmann

Week 8: From a Curatorial Perspective
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Curator and Her Double, The Cruelty of the Avatar", by Ellen Blumenstein, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Appendix B3: Term 3

Week 1: Mapping a Field
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse", by Paul O'Neill, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 2: Researching, Organising, and Learning in the Practice of Curating
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Expanded Field", by Irit Rogoff, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 3: "'Doing It'—Friendly Notes from a Peripatetic Post-Practice", lecture by Mika Savela and Henrik Drufva from Slim Projects
Reading excerpts from "In Defense of the Poor Image", by Hito Steyerl, "'do it' with Hans Ulrich Obrist: The World's Busiest Curator Talks About the Latest Iteration of his 20 Year Project", by Marina Cashdan

Week 4: Artistic Research
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Objects of Study of Commodification of Knowledge? Remarks on Artistic Research", by Simon Sheikh, and "Thinking Through Objects", by Martha Fleming, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi
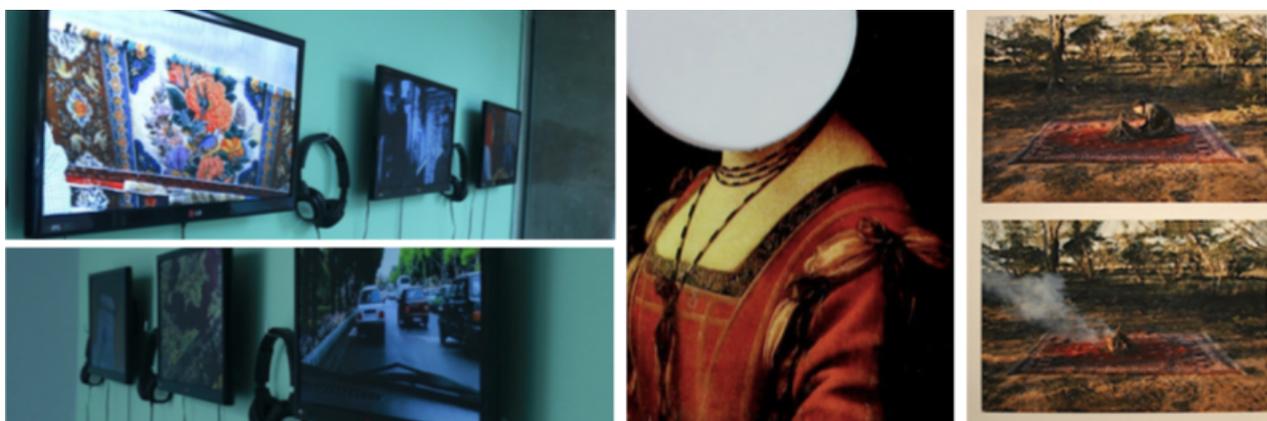
Week 5: In-Betweenness and Persian Visions, Comparing Two Exhibitions, lecture by Hamid Severi

Week 6: Exhibition as a Platform
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Co-Productive Exhibition-Making and Three Principal Categories of Organisation: The Background, the Middle-ground and the Foreground", by Paul O'Neill, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 7: "No-Man's Gallery in Tehran", lecture by Emmelie Koster

Week 8: Responding to Context
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Slow Curating: Re-thinking and Extending Socially Engaged Art in the Context of Northern Ireland", by Megan Johnston, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Appendix B4: Term 4

Week 1: Of Historical Intervention
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Curating Degree Zero Archive 2003–2008: Curatorial Research", by Dorothee Richter and Barnaby Drabble, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 2: Archaeology of the Final Decade, lecture by Vali Mahlouji

Week 3: "Everything You Wanted to Know About Archive, A Short History of Film Archives in Iran", lecture by Aran Javidani

Week 4: Producing the Archive
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Archiving a Revolution in the Digital Age, Archiving as an Act of Resistance", by Lara Baladi, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 5: "Archive Troubles", lecture by Stefan Nowotny
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Historical A Priori and the Archive" by Michel Foucault, and viewing excerpts from The Arrivals by Claudine Bories and Patrice Chagnard

Week 6: Archiving as a Methodology
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "Living Roundabouts in Bahrain, Five Stages of an Artists Residency", by Rheim Alkadhi, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 7: "The Curatorial Practices on Archives; A Brief Study of Centre for Curating the Archive, The Whitechapel Gallery's Archive Displays, & Fieldworks", lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

Week 8: Working in the Archive
Reading and discussions on some excerpts from "The Archive as a Contact Zone", by Giovanna Zapperi and "Curating Africa, Africa Remix and the Categorical Dilemma", by Anthony Downey, lecture by Fereshte Moosavi

APPENDIX C: THE EXHIBITION

Appendix C1: *Trans-Transfiguration: Sheikh Saafi's Anecdote and Any Expandable Thing*, May–June 2017, Lajevardi Foundation, Tehran

To further expand on the theoretical analyses that were learnt and shared in the educational course as to what curatorial practice is and how we can do things curatorially, taking up a practice of exhibition making seemed pertinent. To begin with, reading through proposals submitted by the students, we selected an artefact that shows cultural and historical components as the main drive. An anecdote facilitated a ground for us to study a set of social realities in some historical connections. Then a series of research projects was conducted by the participating students, who gathered some archival material and references to serve as the backbone of our project. Through the suggested subject matter, which will be discussed further below, a series of socio-political relations were revealed on a historical context that helped us to further expand our field of investigation. Accordingly, some artworks were selected, and a series of interviews were conducted to understand and unpack social, aesthetical, historical, and political aspects to our query via visual, aural, and textual materials.
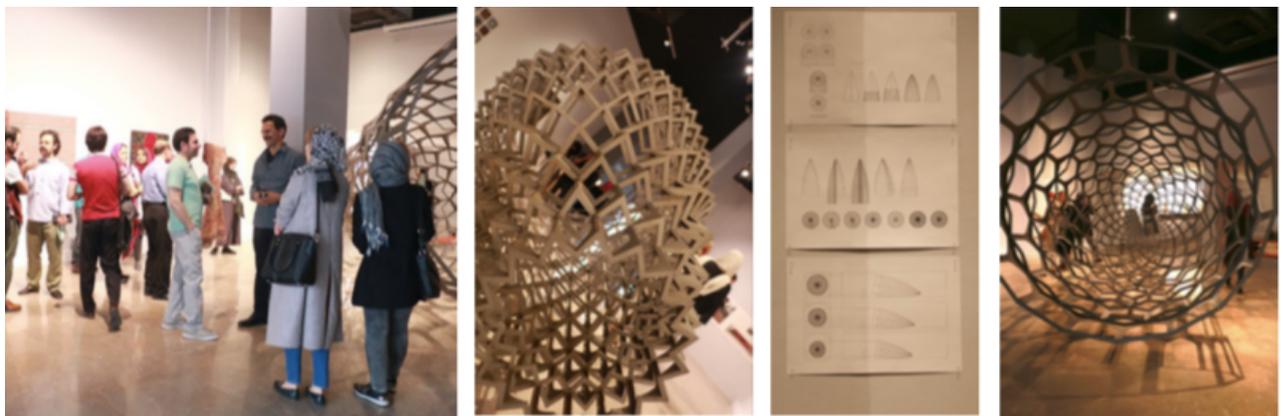
"Farsh" (carpet), which linguistically means 'extensive' or 'any expandable thing', served as a conceptual rubric to study a series of collective, historical, political, and professional relations and replace them in different contexts. This research-based exhibition unfolded onto various fields and suggested new approaches to the assemblages of artistic, institutional, and organised operations. This was realised through two main components that were in connection with one another and juxtaposed within different forms of representation: 1) a selection of artworks that were arranged by ways in which "Farsh" and/or any expandable forms/concepts have been challenged, deconstructed, or reproduced as alternative possibilities; and 2) a combination of collected and documented archival material that acts as references to contextualise historical and political connections visually, aurally, and textually.

The Ardebil carpet, which was made in the town of Ardabil in north-west Iran, is the oldest dated carpet in the world. The carpet was commissioned in the sixteenth century for the burial place of Sheikh Safi al-Din Ardabili (1252–1334, a Kurdish Sunni Muslim eponym of the Safavid Dynasty). It is believed that two of the exact same carpets were commissioned by the court and were gifted to the shrine of the Sheikh Safi, which then had become a place of pilgrimage. The signature on the carpets by Maqsud Kashani indicates the date as AD 1539–1540. Each carpet contained 35,000,000 knots and probably took eight to ten craftsmen more than three years to complete. They were seen last at the shrine of Shaykh Safi al-Din in 1873 when a heavy earthquake damaged the building partially. To reconstruct the shrine, the carpets were removed to a storage temporarily but never returned to the mosque. Later it became public knowledge that the carpets were stolen, but no further details were revealed. A few years later one of the carpets was sold to a Manchester carpet firm, who in turn put it up for sale in 1892. The Victoria and Albert Museum acquired one of the pairs for £2,000 in March 1893. The other pair is currently in the collection of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The arrangements of events around an object through the study of historical anecdotes and remaining archives that were expanded onto different places and times unfolded a series of socio-political and geopolitical relations. In this regard the power relation surrounded by the distribution and accessibility of knowledge and its effects on the conditions at which those knowledges operate corresponded with the contemporary condition.
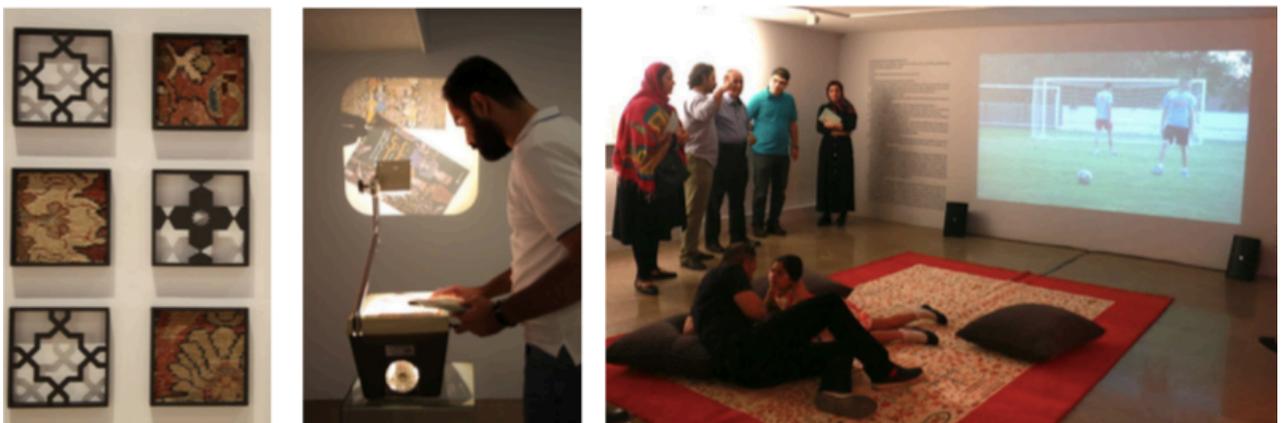
Therefore, through a curatorial approach, a potential site for intervention was set and archives and anecdotes were presented to contextualise different layers of the matter. The artworks were selected and presented in a research-based context to highlight and explore the expandability of relations as such in contemporary sets.

For instance, one of the pieces, titled About Self Service, was a series of four video interviews that I conducted with different curators of a performance called Self Service by Neda Razavipour. The piece originally was performed and curated in different cities and at different times including Tehran, 2009 (curated by Rozita Sharafjahan); Gothenburg, 2010 (curated by Barbad Golshiri); Delhi, 2011 (curated by Girish Shahne); and Paris, 2012 (curated by Fereshteh Daftari). Similar at all of the editions, in this happening the audience members were the performers of the work. The floors of the exhibiting spaces were covered with handmade Persian carpets, and a few pairs of scissors and blades were provided beside the carpets, which were fixed on the walls with long ropes or hung from ceilings. The participating audience members were invited to cut one or more pieces from the carpet and take the pieces with them using the carry bags provided by the artist. On each bag an excerpt from the fourth book of Plato's Republic was printed. Such an act, tearing up a carpet into pieces, was read by some as a cruel response to a nationally loved artefact and for some seemed a courageous and striking move.

In conversations that I conducted with the curators of each edition of the performance, a series of questions was discussed to understand the curatorial methods adopted in each show and the potentials with which the performance was curatorially organised. For instance, the difficulties of curating a performance, how to perform a performance with different performers each time, and what sort of issues the curators had to consider in regards to the institution or place in which the performance took place were some of the topics of the conversations. The videos were edited, subtitled, and played on flat screens installed on a few designed boxes and placed back to back. On the side wall a map of the journey through which this performance continued its life was drawn, including some images and testimonies from some of the participants in previous years. In doing so, an expanded version of this performance was studied and presented in a way in which the structure of the body of the work was on display without seeing the actual performance.

Another example is a series of interviews with different agents in the carpet field conducted by three of the students as a fieldwork project and presented as a six-channel video. Different agents in the field of carpet industry and carpet design, both within the market and educational systems professions, were interviewed in the form of conversations sharing their expertise and concerns in their respective fields. The working condition for both hand-woven and mechanical carpet making, the educational system and labour market, and the industrialization of the field and its effects on the life of traditional designs were some of the aspects that were discussed in these conversations.

Appendix C2: Selected Artworks, Research-Based and Archival Material

1- Farhad Ahrarnia, Hitchcockian Stain' #5, digital print and swing on canvas, 27x32cm, 2012

Farhad Ahrarnia views the Iranian carpet as "an infinite space for unleashing and probing dreams, and for re-imagining and projecting unbounded dramatic scenarios and thrills." With carpets formed out of hundreds of tightly secured knots, and a surface of intense designs and images, both physically and metaphorically, Farhad is suggesting to read the carpet in connection with cinematic quality. In thinking so he imposes a still image from the Alfred Hitchcock movie Psycho on a printed image of a carpet. Ahrarnia writes, "By marrying the physicality of the carpet with the cinematic language of a variety of iconic films I intend to tease out and heighten the sense of suspense and drama which I encounter upon experiencing the physicality of a carpet." Moreover, the notion of 'stain' or 'blotch', with an interest in Slavoj Zizek's Lacanian reading of Hitchcock's films, is created as a visual motif that disturbs and challenges yet is a possibility for resistance.

2a- Bita Ghezelayagh, The Letter that Never Arrived, carpet cloak, metallic tokens and silken thread, 110x110 cm, 2013, 2b- Red Dome, triptych, carpet, patchwork of textile, and silken thread, 110x330 cm, 2017, 2c- Kashi, 9 metal squares, carpet, 70x70 cm, 2017, 2d- The Wound, French tapestry silken thread and brass token, 82x82 cm, 2017

Four works by Bita Ghezelayagh were presented in this exhibition. She works with textiles and artefacts that have been endangered because of mass production and aesthetical transformations after modernism.
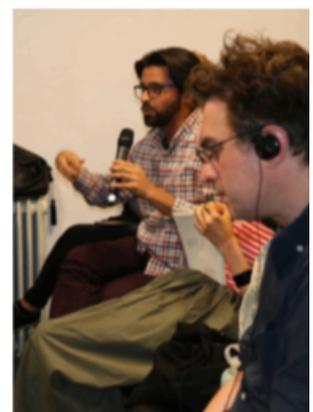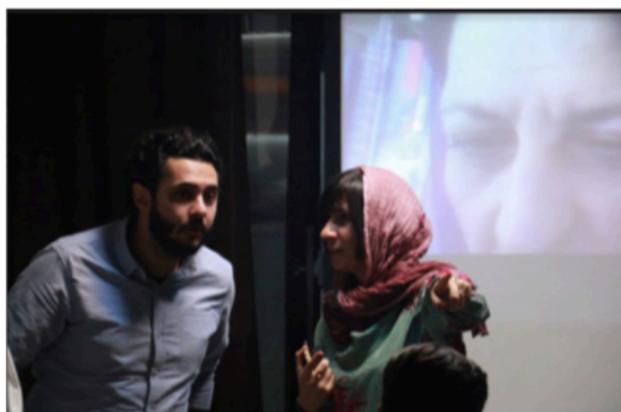
By collecting used carpets and antique fabrics, she preserves and reshapes them into cloaks and dresses or stretches them over a frame and attaches ornaments and objects such as old pen tips or embroidery on them. Sometimes these attachments are faces of martyrs or small gun-shaped decorations that symbolically bring a dimension of war and violation into the work.

3- Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, Let It Not Be Said They Were Naively, Fearfully, Simply, Just Making Art, a *Continuous Film* altered daily (day 12), video projection, duration: 1:15':30", 2015

Ayreen Anastas and Rene Gabri, whose work is extensively studied in Chapter 2 of this thesis, in the winter of 2015 in London created a series of 12 films over a period of four weeks during their exhibition at the Showroom. Each Thursday, Friday, and Saturday the artists performed and edited on one floor of the Showroom art space while the film was projected live downstairs. They suggest in the exhibition brochure at the Showroom that "The live nature of the work, the fragility of its composition, and the large level of improvisation involved were not foregrounded so that viewers could experience the film as film rather as performance or documentation." The last film was selected for the *Trans-Transfiguration: Sheikh Safi's Anecdote and Any Expandable Thing* exhibition on account of its methodology, which assembles
its material from recollection of experiences, as well as their research and notes from their communal readings. Also, on this specific video a series of documentaries manifests the effects of humans on the landscape through industrial debris, emphasizing the scale of such horrendous changes. In this film they attempted to stage the antagonism between social relations based on money/property and social relations based on the commons as an expandable thing.

4- Sahand Hesamiyan, Sulook, stainless steel, 280x280x690 cm, 2015

Sahand Hesamiyan works with the complex geometric structure of ancient Persian and Islamic architectures. Specifically, Sulook is in the form of a dome and in a considerably large scale is a sculpture made of iron and shaped by one geometrical form that could expand infinitely into the space. The term is derived from the Arabic and is rooted in the Sufi tradition of mysticism. In the geometrical design of these parts of Islamic architecture, domes are formed of one geometrical shape that is repeatedly expanding into space, resembling the concept of infinity. In metaphorical terms, the upward movement of the dome relates to the monotheist conception of the transcendental and enlightenment, while the artist presents the work horizontally on the floor, and at this exhibition the viewers could walk inside the piece.

5- About Self Service; In conversation with Rozita Sharafjahan, Barbad Golshiri, Girish Shahane, and Fereshteh Daftari, four-channel video installation, paper, printed images, newspaper, archival material, 2017, This project is an attempt to undo an interactive performance by Neda Razavipour titled Self Service, through the study of its curatorial methodologies and mapping the journey of its presentation at different cities on different times.

6- Saeed Ravanbakhsh, Untitled, mixed media on canvas, 150x150 cm, 2012

In his paintings Saeed Ravanbakhsh proposes a pattern as 'Persian imagery' found in architectural elements, urban plans, manuscripts, and textiles. The geometrical elements, like an oval-shaped motif that could be found both in Persian carpets and architectural designs, merged together in a way that a new pattern has been created.

7- Bouyeh Sadatnia, Patterns Transmutation, perspex, cardboard, mirror, wood, various dimensions, 2017

Bouyeh Sadatnia's work is a call for carpet design as a profession that has almost disappeared because of the modernised mechanical systems of the way carpet is being produced today. Carpet designs were
a resemblance of everyday life in traditional workshops to put carpet designers' imaginations into the abstract forms of geometry. When carpet designs' factories were closed due to modernisation policies, the old designs started to be refined to meet the new customers' taste. Sadatnia's work is a look at the issues of industrialisation and the brutality of the processes of commodification. In one part of the work he uses a collection of original carpet design sheets and arranges them with clear sheets that illustrate the outline of the geometrical shapes drawn on them. Shadows of the engraved designs on the perspex project the same outlines of the geometrical shapes onto the wall. On another part of the work, similar shapes are engraved on round mirrors with a lightbox at their back. Viewers can see their faces in the lightened mirrors combined with the carpet designs.

8- Hossein Valamanesh, Longing Belonging, digital print on paper, 90x302 cm, 2017

Hossein Valamanesh immigrated to Australia in the 1970s. Most of his works have been in relation to immigration or reflecting on the effects of being away from home. For instance, in Longing Belonging the artist records a performance of his setting a carpet on fire in the middle of woodland surrounded by almond trees in the Australian landscape. The result is presented via video and photographs that document the process of the performance. He writes, "Almond trees may be native of the Middle East but they grow in Australia in large numbers. My wife's family has an almond orchard by the River Murray. For the almond to adapt to a new environment they are grafted onto peach rootstock." The idea of transplantation, if it could be true for humans, involves the challenge of old roots adapting to a new environment. Immigration, too, engages in a series of transformations and processes of alterations. For Valamanesh, carpet works as a mediating element that connects him to home, though he burns it from the middle, perhaps to remove any sentimental element from it.

9- A-Aggrandisement, a selection of books and images about Farsh (carpet), were printed on transparent papers. Visitors were encouraged to select their favourite image and project it onto the wall using the provided enlarger.

10- Field-Study, eight-channel video, interviewing different people who are active in the field of carpet making one way or another. Interviews were conducted by the following people because of their special position or expertise in the field: 10a. Fatehali Ghashghayeefar, Isfahan University faculty member, designer, and producer of Iranian handmade carpets, speaking about nomads and their handmade products from the perspective of anthropology, art, and culture in the contemporary era, August 2016; 10b. Ali Bordar, carpet seller and merchant in the Isfahan Carpet Market, speaking about the impact of tourism and foreign clients on the direction of the Iranian carpet market, September 2016; 10c. Jafargholi Fadakar, carpet designer, speaking about the role of carpet design in current times and its history at the school of fine arts in Esfahan; 10d. Mohammad-Mehdi Safarzadeh Haghighi, carpet producer, speaking about the challenges of the production line, October 2016; 10e. Shantia Ghafarian, carpet seller in the Isfahan Carpet Market, speaking about the influence of the type of map selection and materials used in carpet weaving on

its market price, November 2016; and 10f. Hossein Peyghambari, carpet seller, speaking about the impact of recent economic sanctions on exporting, December 2016.

11- Sheikh's Cabinet, a collection of four hundred notes gathered from twenty books about Ardebil carpet and Sheikh Saffi's life and philosophy presented in a drawer. The viewers could shuffle through the notes and read various excerpts randomly from the references. On top of the drawer a video was screened that showed the conservation process of the Ardebil carpet at the Royal Palace Textile Conservation Studios in 2004. An edited collection of excerpts from the original video shows a group of curators and carpet specialists demonstrating the process of cleaning the carpet using high-tech machines. The film was produced by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

The research-based material and archives (works 9–11) were gathered and organised with the help of students from the educational course: Hedieh Toutounchian, Pegah Behrouzfar, Amir Rajaee, Atefeh Emadi, Alireza Mazinani, and Toktam Farmanfarmaian.

Appendix C3: Exhibition Map
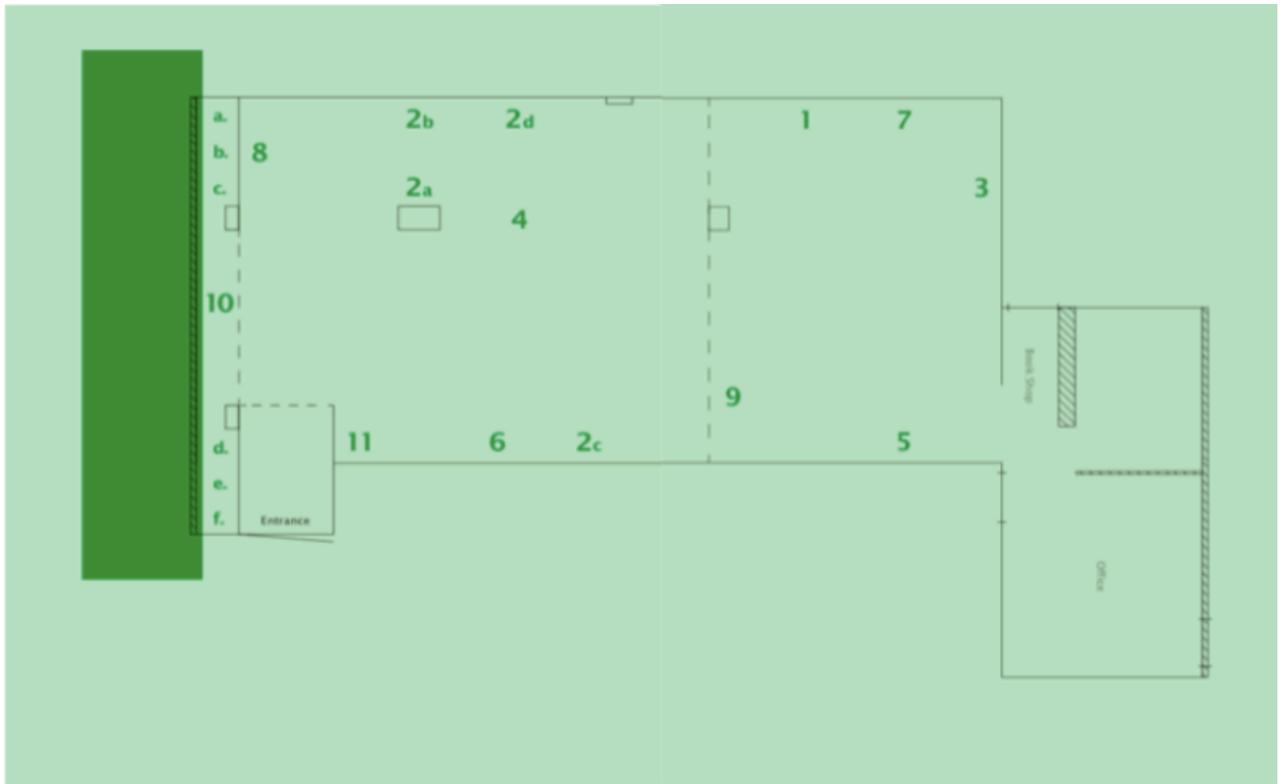
APPENDIX D: TEHRAN CURATORIAL SYMPOSIUM #1
Charsoo-Honar, Tehran, 26–30 May 2017

This symposium aimed to provide a ground on which to study, analyse, criticise, and articulate contemporary curatorial practice and discuss the urgency for a different approach to the circulation of art inside and outside the institution. Over two days a series of lectures, some of which had already been presented at the educational and research-based course, by various curators, academicians, and cultural practitioners from different institutions in diverse locations were presented. Keeping the questions of strategies and methods of curatorial practice in mind, the lecturers were invited to address some of the important issues in contemporary curatorial practice and to some extent suggest alternative possibilities explored through their own research and practices. To situate this topic in the context of Tehran, each set of talks was followed by a roundtable discussion moderated by local curators/practitioners.

All the lectures were presented with simultaneous translation from Farsi to English by Amirhossein Taghiloo.

Appendix D1: Programme
Day 1, Saturday 27 May 2017

Which Context?

• 10:00–10:30 Welcome and introductory notes, Fereshte Moosavi and Saeed Ravanbakhsh
• 10:30–11:15 Elham Pouriamehr (Toronto); "Curating as a Creative Process in 20th Century Iran"
• 11:15–12:00 Viviana Checchia (Glasgow); "The Biennale and Large-Scale Exhibitions as Global and Local Formats"
• 12:00–12:45 Carolina Rito (Nottingham); "Exposing the 'Gazes'—Power Structure and Representations in the Expanded Field of Exhibition-Making"
•12:45–13:30 Panel discussion with the above lecturers, moderated by Hamidreza Karami (Tehran)
•13:30–14:30 Lunch break

Presentation/Representation/Representative

• 15:15–16:00 Vipash Purichanont (Bangkok); "Exhibition of Subjectivity; Curating as a Representational Practice"
• 16:00–16:45 Mahtab Mazlouman (Paris); "About Scenography and Representation"
•16:45–7:30 Panel discussion with the above lecturers, moderated by Amirali Ghasemi (Tehran) •17:30–18:00 Coffee break
•20:00 Dinner with the lecturers and the organisers

Day 2, Sunday 28 May 2017

Educational Urgency; Curating and Production of Knowledge

• 10:00–10:30 Welcome note, Fereshte Moosavi
•10:30–11:15 Selim; Mika Savela, and Henrik Drufva (Helsinki); "'Doing it'—Friendly Notes from a Peripatetic Post-Practice"
• 11:15–12:00 Hamid Severi (Tehran); "In-Betweenness & Persian Visions, Comparing Two Exhibitions"
• 12:00–12:45 Emmelie Koster (Amsterdam); "No-Man's-Land"
12:45–13:30 Panel discussion with the above lecturers, moderated by Combiz Moussavi Aghdam (Tehran) 13:30–14:30 Lunch break

Archiving/ Documenting/ Recording

• 14:30–15:15 Vali Mahlouji (London); Archaeology of the Final Decade, presented by Fereshte Moosavi
• 15:15–16:00 Stefan Nowotny (London); "Archive Troubles"
• 16:00–16: Aran Javidani (Rotterdam); "Everything You Wanted to Know About Archive"
•16:45–17:30 Panel discussion with the above lecturers, moderated by Helia Darabi (Tehran)
•17:30–18:00 Coffee break
•20:00 Dinner with the lecturers and the organisers

A Two-Day Trip to North-East of Iran

The city of Shahrud is in a diverse geographical region almost 400 kilometres to the north-east of Tehran. From the north, Shahrud is surrounded by green scenery of Alborz mountain, but from the south it is expanded into the great salty desert of Dasht-e Kavir (Desert Valley). A short trip was organised to the town of Bastam and Abr Village with the lecturers, some of the students, and some of the collaborators of the project. These places were selected because of their historical quality, the sense of community in emerging practices, and the special geographical location to view the most visible and sensible change of environment.

The dramatic change of weather is one of the remarkable aspects of this location that makes quite a noticeable environmental contrast that played symbolically to highlight the condition in which the practice was taking place. In this trip, the students, lecturers, and general attendees who took part in the symposium emerged into a new public visiting a community of cultural practitioners in Shahrud. The travel produced a possibility of experiencing a different environment, knowing the local practitioners and their stories as well as their methods of implementation of art and life. By visiting a family-run local pottery centre, a family-run library, and a family-run inn that has been operating for generations, a different sense of community and new forms of practice was developed.

Timeline Of Events

• 29 May, a walk to Jangal-e Abr (Cloud Forest)
• 29 May, staying overnight at a traditional villager's house (B&B), Abr Village
• 30 May, visiting the family library and speaking with the volunteer librarians about the story of the special book collection preserved by the family who devoted their house to a public library
• 30 May, visiting Bayazid Bastāmi Shrine, Bastām
• 30 May, visiting the Ghanbeygis' pottery studio and gallery as well as Mr and Mrs Ghanbeygi's workshop, presenting some information about a kiln that has been built based on traditional methods while modern techniques have been employed.
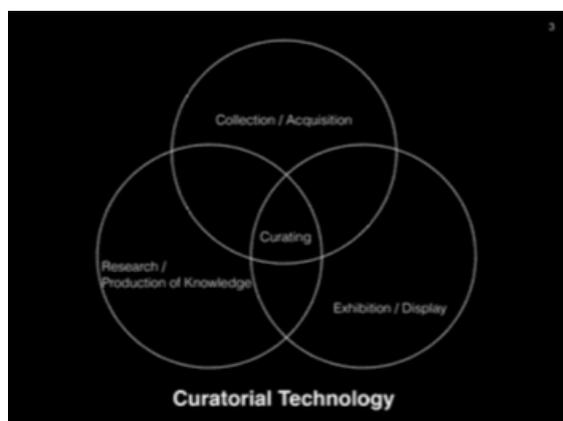
curatorial
in other words
May-June-2017-Tehran

Dear Dr. Savela & Mr. Drufva   03-April-2017

Charsoo Art & Cultural Centre is honoured for your participation at the **Tehran Curatorial Symposium #0** to take place from 26 to 31 May 2017 in Tehran.
Exploring means of power-relations in the domain of art and engaging in critical strategies that recognise the potentials within such structures make a generative ground for a critical study of art. This symposium aims to provide a ground on which to study, analyse, criticise and articulate contemporary curatorial practice and sit in conversation to discuss the urgency of a different approach to the practice of curating. The series of lectures presented at the *Educational & Research-based Course on Curatorial Practice* by curators, academicians and cultural practitioners such as yourself from various locations will address some of the most important issues around and about the notion of curating aiming to raise some critical questions on this mode of doing in Tehran.

Friday-26-May-3-6-8pm

Trans-Transfiguration; Sheikh Safi's Anecdote & Any Expandable Thing
Viewing of the exhibition co-curated by the students at the Lajevardi Foundation. "Farsh" as an expandable *thing* performs a conceptual derivative to study a series of social and professional relations in the domain of art in Tehran. This research-based exhibition unfolds onto various fields and suggests new approaches to the assemblages of artistic, institutional, and organised operations.

CURATORIAL in other words
A panel discussion aiming to contextualise this symposium and the urgency of its query to a larger audience
Location TBC

Saturday-27-May-10am-5pm

WHICH CONTEXT?

--Fereshte Moosavi & Saeed Ravanbakhsh; Introductions & welcome
--Bassam El Baroni (Alexandria); *Art, the Curatorial and Abstraction from Pre-Crisis to Post-Crisis Globalisation*
--Dr. Viviana Checchia (Glasgow); *Global Tendencies*
--Elham Pouriamehr (Iran); *A Short History of Exhibition Makings*

PRESENTATION/ RE-PRESENTATION/ REPRESENTATIVE

--Dr. Je Yun Moon (London); *What Would It Mean For Choreography To Perform as an Exhibition?*
--Vipash Purichanont (Bangkok); *Exhibition of Subjectivity; Living Space as Representation of the Self and the World*
--Dr. Carolina Rito (Nottingham); *Exposing the 'Gazes'- Power Structure and Representations in the Expanded Field of Exhibition Making*
--Dr. Mahtab Mazlouman (Paris); *In Conversation with M. Mazlouman about Cinegraphy and Representation*

Sunday-28-May-10am-5pm

EDUCATION URGENCY:
CURATING & PRODUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

--Selim; Dr. Mika Savela & Henrik Drufva (Helsinki); *Doing it - Friendly Notes From a Peripatetic Post-Practice*
--Hamid Severi (Iran); *In Betweenness & Persian Visions*
--Emmelie Koster (Amsterdam); *No-Man's-Land Gallery in Tehran*

ARCHIVING/ DOCUMENTING/ RECORDING

--Vali Mahlouji (London); *Archaeology of the Final Decade*
--Dr. Stefan Nowotny (London); *Archive Troubles*
--Aran Javidani (Rotterdam); *Everything You Wanted To Know About Archive*

*All of the above events are open to public but registration is strictly required.*

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A journey to Shahrud
Monday-28-May-Tuesday-30-May

A two-day trip is organised for all of the lecturers and the students to Shahrud, a historical city at a few hours driving distance from the north east of Tehran in the Semnan province. A notable building inherited by the *Ravanbakhsh's family* has been devoted to be used as a public library. This special space will be hosting us during our stay in Shahrud. In this short journey we aim to not only view a considerably different prospect of Iranian landscape and visit some of the historical sites, but also will be doing collective practices inside the provided space of the library. In doing so, we hope to reflect on the lectures and discussions that took place during the symposium losing the intensity of theory into the practice of everyday and being in the nature.

Wednesday-31-May

In order to get the gist of the city we will go to the city centre of Tehran visiting Grand Bazar and walk to a few recently opened exhibition spaces.

Practical Notes
Visa:
Please kindly visit Iranian Consulate Website or http://www.iranvisa.co.uk for further information and the type of visa you need to acquire to travel to Iran.

Accommodation:
A number of art-residencies have been allocated for your stay and are arranged by Charsoo at locations near this institute for all of the lecturers. Further details will be shared with you soon.

Transportation:
For traveling to and from the events' locations during this period, minibuses are provided by Charsoo Centre at all times.

Please contact us should you have any questions at this stage.
Further information and a full detailed programme with relevant maps will be shared with you soon.
Thank you once again for your participation.

Warm regards
Saeed Ravanbakhsh
Co-Founder & Director / Charsoo Art & Cultural Centre

APPENDIX E: THE PUBLICATION
Curatorial in Other Words, to be launched in January 2019

To actualise the possibility of a curatorial discourse in Tehran, literal transformations and lingual innovations are quite essential. *Curatorial, in Other Words* is a bilingual book (Farsi/English) organised in conjunction with a complex project encompassing; Tehran Curatorial Symposium #0 (May 2017, Tehran), the educational and research-based course (December 2015–November 2016), and the exhibition: *Trans- Trans-Figuration: Sheikh Safi's Anecdote & Any Expandable Thing*, (May–June 2017).

Edited by myself and to be published and sponsored by Charsoo Art and Culture Centre, this publication presents a collection of essays and articles to explore power relations in the domain of art and engage in critical strategies to recognise the potentialities of curatorial practice in complex conditions. A series of lectures presented at the educational course as well as the symposium by curators, academicians, and cultural practitioners is included in this publication, addressing some of the important issues about the practice of curatorship today. This is followed by conversations and debates during the panel discussions that took place at the symposium.

APPENDIX F: POSTER

APPENDIX G: PUBLIC TALKS AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Two events were organised in conjunction with the exhibition: 1) a public panel presenting a conversation between myself and a few of the participating artists including Bita Ghezelayagh, Sahand Hesamiyan, Saeed Ravanbakhsh, Neda Razavipour, and Bouyeh Sadatnia; 2) a curator's tour of the exhibition for art university students, departmental heads in the visual arts, and a few journalists from some artistic and cultural magazines in Tehran.

Listed below are links to some media coverage about the exhibition, symposium, and the events organised in conjunction with the Curatorial in Other Words. The last item links to this project's weblog.

1. https://tandismag.com/35312/کیوریتیال-حکایت-شیخ-صفی.html

2. http://www.honaronline.ir/-بخش-تجسمی-99282/4-تور-نمایشگاه-دیگر-دگرگونی-حکایت-شیخ-صفی-هر-چیز-گستردنی

3. http://www.honaronline.ir/-بخش-تجسمی-99346/4-پروژه-ای-چند-لایه-برای-درک-معنای-گسترده کیوریتوریال-سمپوزیوم-پژوهشی-در-نمایشگاه-دیگر-دیگرگونی-حکایت-شیخ-صفی-هر-چیز-گستردنی-برگزار-می-شود

4. https://www.lawrieshabibi.com/news/297/

5. http://www.iranart.ir/-بخش-تجسمی-5890/3-جناب-شیخ-صفی-آقای-فرش-کیوریتوری-در-نمایشگاه-دیگر دگرگونی-حکایت-شیخ-صفی-هر-چیز-گستردنی-گزارش-تصویری

6. http://www.honarnet.com/news/66

7. https://honargardi.com/گفت-گو-پیرامون-اولین-دوره-آموزشی-کیور/

8. http://www.farhangsara.ir/tabid/4166/ArticleId/63210/.aspx

9. http://www.mmoossaavvii.com