

See me, feel me, touch me, heal me:
**Working with affect, emotion, and creation of
transformative energies as a feminist curatorial practice**

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Abstract

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This research presents the gap contemporary curatorial discourses have in terms of feminist theory and work, as well as the gap principal contemporary discourses on feminisms and curating have in terms of discursive curatorial practices and independent curatorship. I argue, that the current discussions on feminisms and curating are narrowed down by governing art historical approaches, in which focus remains on representation instead of curatorial practice. Focusing primarily on exhibitions presenting art by feminist and/or women artists, the critique remains in the ways exhibitions are framed in terms of art historical narratives within museum institutions.

The paradigm of feminist curating needs to be shifted to the realm of the curatorial, in order to extend the discussion to discursive feminist curatorial practices and the actual potential of feminist curatorial work with art. Within the curatorial, curating is seen beyond exhibition-making as a discursive practice with art, artists, spaces and audiences.

Drawing from curatorial theory, affect theory, and feminist new materialist theory, I present a model for a feminist curatorial practice based on a process of thinking with art, and aiming at creating transformative energies through affective encounters with artworks. The practice relies on the political potential of affect, and engages the notion of affective transformation as an essential part of feminist work with contemporary art. Curating is discussed in relation to independent curatorship, with reflection on my own practice.

I analyse current discourses in the fields of contemporary curating, and curating and feminist thought, and present current views on feminist affect and new materialist theory. I discuss the topics through reflection on selected artistic and curatorial practices, exhibition projects, and two group exhibitions I have curated during the research process.

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1 Introduction

The journey

This research started forming already in 2011 while I worked on my MA degree in curating art at Stockholm University. For my thesis, I conducted interviews with Swedish artists Sara-Vide Ericson, Åsa Ersmark, Carola Grahn, Oscar Guermouche, Karin Hermansson and the collective Malmö Free University for Women (Johanna Gustavsson and Lisa Nyberg), who were all working in different ways with feminisms or more generally, gender. The thesis focused above all on the artists' views on the political aspects of their practices and how they saw the significance of feminist work in the field of art in Sweden. Having embarked on the research primarily through my interest in these artistic practices, during the process I started to pose the questions also towards myself; surely in the role of the curator I, also, should bear my responsibility in terms of a possible feminist practice? In the process of forming a feminist curatorial identity, it became clear to me, that the practice of the curator (concepts, thinking and acting) weighs as much as the practice of the artist. Thus, I became more and more interested in how I, as a curator, could actually work with feminism. Some of these reflections became part of the MA thesis. Looking at realised art projects and literature on the topic, I was able to extract three different ways of relating to gender and feminisms in curatorial practices: 1) looking at representation in collections and/or exhibition programs, 2) working with gender and/or feminisms thematically, and 3) working with a feminist curatorial strategy, where the feminist politics is built-in, and manifests in the curatorial practice as a whole, and not only in the thematic choices in curated projects. It is this latter approach which remains at the core of this PhD thesis.

At the beginning of my PhD studies I aspired to detect and name a range of possible feminist strategies (to be) used in curatorial practices through case studies, and the thesis would be structured around an analysis of these strategies. I wanted to map out alternative, possibly even implicit ways of working with feminisms

structurally.¹ I was interested in the questions: how can a feminist approach be embedded in a curatorial practice and its methods, and how have curators worked with deconstructing gendered hierarchies and power relations as part of their practices. Instead of looking at themes in exhibitions or artworks, I was from the very start thinking about the *process* and *practice* of curating: the ways of working with artists, artworks, audiences, spaces and institutions, and how feminist thought could manifest in this work.²

By the end of my first year, I understood a mapping of all possible feminist curatorial strategies was too broad as a topic, and at the same time, I realised this was not the focus that I actually wanted to have, considering my double role as both a researcher and a practitioner. I also understood I wasn't able (nor willing) to position myself in the research as an art historian, looking at the topic of feminist thought and curating from an art historical distance. I was too involved with art, collaborating with artists, and thinking and feeling through art, to receive enough meaning or, in fact, *joy* from inspecting the topic from afar. I didn't want to conduct the research as a set of case studies, employing an art historical position of analysing and reflecting upon what had been done. It became clear, then, that my focus would be on *feminist strategies in curating* rather than inspecting *feminist exhibitions*, and also, that I would conduct the thesis from a curatorial point of view. What this means to me, is that I do not only analyse and reflect upon exhibitions and curatorial practices

¹ As feminist curator Renée Baert notes: "I want to highlight how ways of working, not explicitly stated in feminist terms, can be outcomes of such engagements and the discourses arising from them, yet not programmatically so. In this instance, one might consider the attention to affect, embodiment and relational aesthetics, the subtle subversion of hierarchies and conventions, the collaborative process, the gendering of material history, the exploration of minor histories and recast of dominant ones ... Feminism has for many years been intertwined with other critical sites in culture, and "folded in" with these. Feminist historiographies must find a way to incorporate such work" (2010, 177). This research didn't in the end become a feminist historiography, which would have unfolded curatorial practices and projects from a feminist perspective, but I have been guided by Baert's thought that there is much to be found in close-readings of projects now categorised mostly under the topics of 'the critical' and 'the political'.

² Throughout this thesis I am writing about curating as *work*, referring to curating both as a profession, and as labour.

related to feminisms, but I am actively thinking about alternatives and possibilities for feminist curatorial practices *in-becoming*.

While reading into literature that has so far been written on the topic of feminisms and curating, I came across Jennifer Fisher's essay "Exhibitionary Affect" (2006). The essay was hugely inspiring to me, since Fisher doesn't only address feminist curating from the point of view of independent curatorship, but does this simultaneously from the point of view of affect, recognising the political aspect of the concept and presenting it as a useful tool for a feminist curator. Reading the essay, I realised it had been the aspect of affect all along, that had led me to work with art in the first place. In the very foundations, the idea beneath my curatorial practice is to share significant encounters and experiences I have myself had with art: to enable encounters between artworks and viewers, and aim to enable slight shifts to take place within viewers as part of these encounters.

At the end of my first year of studies, I also took part in NOISE Summer School organised by Utrecht University in the Netherlands. The title of the week-long summer school was "Political Aesthetics and Feminist Theory: Media, Art and Affect". Attending the summer school was of much help in introducing me to the concept of affect and the field of affect studies. As part of the course readings, we read *Carnal knowledge: towards a 'new materialism' through the arts* (2013) edited by Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt. Perhaps partly as a consequence of this context of my introduction to affect, and partly reinforced by my later research, I link feminist new materialist theory with affect studies, as the fields overlap and share a common ground in acknowledging agency of nonhuman entities, and see much potential in inquiries into the material and embodied aspects of our being, along with the co-existence we share with various materialities and nonhuman beings. The aspects of affect and feminist new materialist theory entered the sphere of my research at the same time.³

³ Richard Grusin uses *the nonhuman turn* as an umbrella term and counts the following intellectual and theoretical developments as part of it: Bruno Latour's actor-network theory; affect theory; animal studies, developed partly through Donna Haraway's work; the assemblage theory developed by Deleuze and Guattari, Latour, and others; new brain

In the process of the thesis topic narrowing down and beginning to unfold as a proposal for one possible feminist curatorial practice through affect and emotion, I became curious above all about politics of good feeling, happiness and love. This happened while reading into Sara Ahmed's writing, particularly the essay "Happy Objects" (2010), as well as *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2014). Talking about this turn in the research process with peers, it soon seemed I was walking on thin ice. I was warned (even still at my transfer panel from MPhil to PhD) about being careful with my reasoning when discussing emotion and feeling, and particularly discussing topics of happiness and love in a feminist context, where these concepts have a high risk of associating as feminine and thus, unserious, matters (Ahmed 2014, 3). My impression was, however, that feeling and emotion remain as issues left aside within contemporary feminist scholarly writing on art and curating, and require further discussion (noted also by Best 2011; Doyle 2013). I had planned to write a full chapter on politics of love, happiness and good feeling, but in the end, I had to cut the chapter out because of time and space related matters. Even if this partial focus on good feeling, happiness and love was left out, the focus in the thesis remains to a great extent in topics related to feeling and emotion. During the research process, I have also curated two group exhibitions, *Only the Lonely* (2015) and *Good Vibrations* (2017), which both participated in their ways in discussions around the significance of good feeling.

I realised *Only the Lonely* during spring 2015 at La Galerie centre for contemporary art in Noisy-le-sec/Paris. The exhibition (discussed in chapter five) focused on the possibilities of encountering a work of art as a character with their own personality, investigating the possibility and potential invested in affective encounters between humans and nonhumans. The exhibition concept was based on warm-hearted feelings of compassion and empathy as part of the encounters with the artworks. The curatorial process with the exhibition allowed me to think further affective

sciences such as neuroscience and artificial intelligence; new materialism in feminism, philosophy, and Marxism; new media theory; speculative realism, including object-oriented philosophy; and systems theory (Grusin 2015, viii-ix).

relationalities in practice, and the artworks that participated in the show opened up new paths for this.

Good Vibrations was realised at the artist-run non-profit art space SIC in Helsinki in May 2017. The exhibition (discussed in chapter six) focused on summoning energies, and explored the ability of works of art to carry and transmit good feeling. The process with the exhibition allowed me to think further the affective materiality of works of art, and think about how to work with this within a specific space. The process with these exhibition projects, together with the reading and thinking, have guided me through this research, which discusses relations between art, curating, feminist thought, and affect.

To summarize my position in the framework of this research, I am positioning myself as a north European woman educated in Finland, Sweden and the UK. I have been writing this thesis in London, Paris, St Just, Helsinki, Stockholm, and I completed writing it in Turku, Finland. My educational background is in history of art, women's studies, gender studies, and curating. My understanding of knowledge is formed within the humanities, disciplines relying on interpretation, and understanding theory to be a tool for investigating various economico-socio-cultural phenomena, which in my case have been located in the fields of art and visual culture in general. In this research, and in my curatorial practice, art is a companion to be with, and to think about the world through. Much like Angela Dimitrakaki (2013) describes, as a feminist independent curator, I don't make a difference between life and work; art, work and life come together in the everyday. As much, I could also put my relationship with art in Lucy Lippard's words: "The ideas that I got from artists have formed the ways I look at the world" (Obrist 2008, 233).

In addition to this more personal curatorial and research-based development, this thesis has grown out of and developed parallel to discussions and events in the field of art mainly in Europe and North America since 2010. There's a large number of artists, artworks, curators, exhibitions and projects I could mention that have somehow influenced my thinking during this time. *dOCUMENTA (13)* in Kassel in

2012, curated by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, was and remains a huge source of inspiration for me. This was the first time I encountered new materialist thinking as part of a curatorial concept. Also, Christov-Bakargiev's wider curatorial approach with *dOCUMENTA (13)*, the 'no concept' concept, based on a vast research process, discussions, readings, and an associate process of thinking with and through art, has had an impact on my curatorial thinking (Christov-Bakargiev 2014).

Mika Rottenberg's solo exhibition *Sneeze to Squeeze* [fig. 1] at Magasin III kunsthalle in Stockholm in 2013 was also significant for me. I still see it as one of the most feminist exhibitions I have been to, even if feminism wasn't in any explicit way discussed in the curatorial texts of the show. The exhibition was curated by Tessa Braun, and it took over the whole kunsthalle space. Particularly the first floor of the exhibition could be viewed as one installation consisting of separate works, which all discussed systems of women's labour, and were spiced with absurd humour. The protagonists and active agents in Rottenberg's works are most often women. In the videos one could observe the production of bizarre products as part of complicated production lines manoeuvred by the female workers. The women produce things



fig.1 Installation view, Mika Rottenberg, *Sneeze to Squeeze*, 2013 at Magasin III Museum & Foundation for Contemporary Art. Photo: Christian Saltas, 2013.



fig. 2. Installation view, Camille Henrot, *The Pale Fox*, 2014, Chisenhale Gallery. Courtesy kamel mennour, Paris and Johann König, Berlin. Photo: Andy Keate.

such as dough, scented tissues, and a huge mysterious cube containing materials such as cabbage, ceramics, plastics, and make-up. In Rottenberg's films it is women who run the system and keep the machinery working. The corporeality of the women and their physical labour is in a central role.⁴ The artist manages to represent each woman in a way it is impossible to view them as sexualized objects. Performing their tasks, the women express ownership of their bodies, and also the gaze. At the same time, they are presented as parts of a machinery bigger than themselves.

The spatial arrangements of the exhibition guided the viewer and controlled how the works, and also the images, could be viewed. Thus, feminist politics didn't manifest only in the video pieces, but also in the spatial arrangements of the gallery space. It seemed as if the corporeality of the women was translated into the space of the exhibition itself, and here, transferred to the visitor. Defying the alleged neutrality of a white cube space, the artist altered the exhibition space by lowering ceilings, creating corridors, and using fake walls to create closed non-spaces within the space. Some videos you could only see through a peep hole in the wall. There

⁴ One aspect that could be discussed and unravelled further regarding Rottenberg's female characters, however, is representation of ethnicity: how it plays out in the videos, and what kind of meanings the representations gain.

was also a number of different tactile materials used in the space: some parts of the ceiling looked damp, some parts of the floor had a carpet, some videos were shown in container-like spaces, and so on.

I had a similar experience at Camille Henrot's solo exhibition *The Pale Fox* at Chisenhale Gallery in London in 2014 [fig. 2]. I see the feminism in Henrot's work in her approach to materials, materiality, and the claiming of agency to a female narrator.⁵ Also, thinking about the spatial and embodied experience of being the exhibition (which could, not so much unlike Rottenberg's show described above, be viewed as a whole installation built in a soft blue room), it felt like stepping into her earlier video piece "Grosse Fatigue" (2013), shown at the 55th Venice Biennale as part of *The Encyclopaedic Palace* exhibition curated by Massimiliano Gioni. Also Phyllida Barlow's solo exhibition *Demo* at Kunsthalle Zurich in 2016 was extremely inspiring to me, particularly in terms of thinking about creation of energies within a space. To me, the exhibition as a whole was a huge *bloc of sensations* (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 164) and vibrant energy materialised. Against my expectations, I was also highly inspired by the re-enactment of Harald Szeemann's momentous *When attitudes become form* at Fondazione Prada in Venice in 2013 (the original having taken place at Kunsthalle Bern in 1969). What spoke to me above all, was the interplay of the works of art within the space and the tangible dynamics they created.

During the research process, also exhibitions which I haven't had the chance to experience in person, have influenced my thinking. I have encountered these projects through documentation and exhibition catalogues. Of these, I can mention *If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution: Edition IV – Affect* (2010-2012) at different locations, curated by Tanja Baudoin, Frédérique Bergholtz and Vivian Zihlerl (discussed in chapter five); *This will have been: Love, art and politics in the 1980s* (2012) at Museum of Contemporary Art Chicago curated by Helen Molesworth; and

⁵ Again, a vaster inquiry into questions of gender, sexuality and ethnicity is in order with several of Henrot's works, often based on anthropological methods. For example, in *Grosse Fatigue* (2013) the artist uses a range of creation myths from different indigenous cultures as her material, in order to create her own narrative in a manner that might be interpreted as a colonialist act.

Inside the visible: An elliptical traverse of twentieth century art, in, of and from the feminine (1996-1997) a touring exhibition curated by Catherine de Zegher (discussed in chapter six).

The second decade of the millennium has already witnessed a variety of trends and thematics within contemporary art worlds, manifesting as works of art, artistic and curatorial projects, discussions, exhibitions, exhibition programmes, publications, essays. In addition to the projects mentioned above, the overarching currents in the contemporary global art scene have undoubtedly affected my views presented in this thesis. As an extremely brief summary, for the purpose of locating this research at a certain time and place, I'd argue that there have been two main lines of thought present within contemporary visual arts during the second decade of 2000s: one leaning toward philosophies of speculative realism and object oriented ontology, acceleration and accelerationism, critique of neo-liberal politics and global capitalism, and the sarcasm and irony of post-internet art; and one which could be defined as a nonhuman one, leaning toward artistic, philosophical and academic explorations of relations between ecological, socio-cultural and politico-economic structures through new materialist and affective theories, manifesting as artistic practices and projects with focus on interspecies co-existence and attunement with various materialities beyond ourselves. I think these two lines of thought also intersect at various points, essentially as part of the critique of neo-liberal politics and global capitalist structures.

To begin with the first strand, the opening lines of *You Are Here: Art After the Internet* (2014) edited by Omar Kholeif, serves as a pointed introduction:

It is 2014 and I'm anxious. My computer, my phone, and my email calendars are all alerting me to different tasks that I must fulfil. I open my Google calendar (personal life), my Outlook calendar (work), my iPhone calendar (ad hoc activity), and start to panic at the sheer amount of commitments that have been scheduled, synched up, and fixed across multiple platforms that bind and enforce my daily life. Generic alarm tones sound from various devices, composing a scene that is as fretful as it is comic (Kholeif 2014, 11).

Focusing partly on the acceleration depicted in Kholeif's quote above and the so-called post-internet art movement, the 9th Berlin Biennale (2016), curated by the

collective DIS (Lauren Boyle, Solomon Chase, Marco Roso and David Toro), manifested several of the topics listed above with a sarcastic approach to contemporary phenomena. Kholeif also curated the exhibition *Electronic Superhighway (2016-1966)* at Whitechapel Gallery in London in the spring of 2016. The exhibition contextualised post-internet art with art based on computer and internet technologies from the 1960s and onward, and it was constructed as a scroll movement starting in the present and moving on backwards: a rhythm of acceleration starting as a hectic present in terms of arrangements in the gallery rooms, and calming down while moving backwards.

As for the second, *softer* strand, it can be said this research relates to several of the notions listed above: further discussion on these contexts unfolds through the chapters of this thesis. *dOCUMENTA (13)* (2012) can be named as one of the most central art events discussing these topics. Two projects conducted at the Haus der Kulturen der Welt in Berlin, *Animism* (2012)⁶ curated by Anselm Franke and *Anthropocene Observatory* (2013-2014)⁷ arranged by Armin Linke, Territorial Agency and Anselm Franke, can also be named as influential. While *Animism* discussed the topics through the formation and deconstruction of the modern world-view, *Anthropocene Observatory* discussed the geopolitical effects taking us to the current state of things. In September 2016 Donna Haraway's influential essay "Tentacular Thinking: Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Chthulucene" was published in the *e-flux journal*.⁸ The annual large-scale art events in the 'marathon' series at Serpentine Galleries, *Transformation marathon* (2015)⁹ and *Miracle marathon* (2016)¹⁰, were both built around topics related to ecologies, relations, and object and material related philosophies and politics. The publication *Art in the Anthropocene: Encounters Among*

⁶ https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2012/animismus/start_animismus.php (Accessed 19/09/2018).

⁷ https://www.hkw.de/en/programm/projekte/2014/anthropozaenobservatorium20132014/start_anthropozaen_observatorium_2013_2014.php (Accessed 19/09/2018).

⁸ <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/75/67125/tentacular-thinking-anthropocene-capitalocene-chthulucene/> (Accessed 19/09/2018).

⁹ <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/transformation-marathon> (Accessed 19/09/2018).

¹⁰ <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/miracle-marathon> (Accessed 19/09/2018).

Aesthetics, Politics, Environments and Epistemologies, edited by Heather Davis and Etienne Turpin, was published in 2015 as part of the on-going discussions in the art field. Also in 2016, Nicolas Bourriaud titled the 9th Taipei Biennial as “The Great Acceleration: Art in the Anthropocene”.¹¹ The biennial was an attempt to respond to the theoretical and philosophical sources on the concept of the Anthropocene, our current geological era, in a contemporary art context.¹² In the curatorial text, Bourriaud (2014) refers to speculative realism and object-oriented ontology (ooo) as his main sources – but not, I need to note, the more feminist branches of posthuman theory by for example Rosi Braidotti or Donna Haraway, nor new materialist theory, practiced more by feminist academics than the more “male realm” of speculative realism and ooo.¹³ In addition to discussions on the Anthropocene, human and nonhuman ecologies, and lives of objects and materials present in the contemporary gallery and biennial scene, new materialist breezes were also blowing in museum institutions, as for example Tate Modern did a re-hanging of part of their collection exhibition under the title *Material Worlds* in 2016. The museum hosted also a three-day event bringing together actors from artistic and academic fields to discuss topics related to new materialist theories in art and research, and organised a public talk, *New Materialisms: Reconfiguring the Object*, as part of the event in May 2016.¹⁴

¹¹ https://www.tfam.museum/Exhibition/Exhibition_page.aspx?ddlLang=en-us&id=511&allObj=%7B%22JJMethod%22%3A%22GetEx%22%2C%22Type%22%3A%220%22%2C%22Year%22%3A%22%22%2C%22pg_num%22%3A4%2C%22pg_size%22%3A21%7D (Accessed 19/09/2018).

¹² The Anthropocene is one of the key concepts attached to various positions in relation to the nonhuman turn as part of a wide array of current critical, theoretical and philosophical approaches to the humanities, social studies, as well as visual art practices (Grusin 2017, vii-xix).

¹³ Interestingly enough, the Taipei Biennial 2018, opening in November 2018 and curated by Mali Wu and Francesco Manacorda, continues from the same topic and is titled *Post-Nature: A Museum as Ecosystem*. https://www.tfam.museum/News/News_page.aspx?id=1123&ddlLang=en-us (Accessed 12/09/18).

¹⁴ *New Materialism Training School, Research Genealogies and Material Practices* took place at Tate Modern, London 27-29 May 2016. <https://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/new-materialism-training-school-research-genealogies-and-material-practices> (Accessed 15/09/2018).

Main concepts

Contemporary curating

The history of curating is still rather recent and brief, as the field only began the process of being theorized, contextualized and professionalized in the late 1980s through the launch of the first curatorial post-graduate programmes. Paul O'Neill's *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures(s)* (2012) can be seen as the first overarching analysis of the development of contemporary curatorial discourses from the late 1960s. In the publication, based on his PhD research, O'Neill extracts three main lines of development: the emergence of the independent curator while curatorial practice detached from its origins in the tasks of the caretaker of collections in museum institutions in the late 1960s; proliferation of biennial culture in the late 1980s along with the globalisation of the art world and globalised curatorial discourse; and finally, the development of contemporary curatorial practices since the 1990s, where curatorial practices become relatable to artistic practices and a more critical discourse is created around the profession. I discuss curating and the curatorial in detail in chapter two. What I see as significant for this thesis in terms of the short history of curating, is that the discourse is written from the point of view of practicing independent curators (separated from a museum studies context), that the field of curating has been in an accelerated process of being professionalised and theorised since the late 1980s, and that my research joins the more recent critical writings on curating, focusing primarily on *how to work with art*.

In 2009, curator Maria Lind inaugurated *Artforum's* column series on curating with her essay "The Curatorial". In the column, she contextualised curatorial practice beyond curating – the act of making an exhibition happen. The curatorial was used as a concept to expand the field of curating beyond exhibition-making to concern an overarching theoretical, philosophical and cross-disciplinary approach to work with art. The concept of the curatorial became a starting point for several publications and conferences on curatorial practices by 2012 (Lind 2012; von

Bismarck, Schaffaff & Weski 2012; Martinon 2013; von Bismarck & Meyer-Krahmer 2016). The aim has on the other hand been on opening current discourses of curating to criticality and theorization, and on the other, on offering a broad enough definition to the concept of the curatorial itself. For example, in the anthology *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (2013) edited by Jean-Paul Martinon, the writers take on the delicate endeavour of defining and unfolding the curatorial. In a nearly enigmatic way, the essays in the anthology describe the curatorial as a notion falling in-between categories and disciplines, being within a constant process of *becoming* and producing knowledges, all aspects characterized by a need for criticality and rethinking. Thus, through the literature, the curatorial appears as a sphere – not exactly a methodology, not exactly a discipline, and absolutely not a practice in the traditional sense – of criticality and knowledge production, in different ways related to the field of curating art.

Feminisms

My reading of works of art as well as texts within this thesis is undoubtedly affected by my own views on feminisms. Throughout this research, I am referring to feminisms in the plural. This is to highlight the fact that feminism is not one unified project, but entails various approaches to unravelling power structures concerning gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, nationality, generation, and ability.¹⁵ To position myself in the research, then, I am briefly presenting my feminist background. The foundations of my feminism were most probably laid through lived experience before I encountered the field of feminist art history while studying history of art at Helsinki University in early 2000s. First reacting with a strong refusal – understanding the world as equal to women and men through my individualistic world view – but soon converted when reading *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (1996), edited by Griselda Pollock. The essays in the volume made me see the existing gendered power relations embedded

¹⁵ I see the need for talking about feminisms in the plural thus mainly in the light of intersectional feminist research (e.g. Lykke 2011).

in the whole art historical canon I was studying. We did not have separate courses for feminist art history, but my professor in her turn embedded feminist readings as a constant reference point during seminars. At the time, I became interested in visual culture studies, and explored images in the crossings of art and fashion photography in my MA theses for both history of art, and gender studies. I was strongly influenced by feminist research on representation in the field of visual culture studies, and specifically by the work by two Finnish art historians, Leena-Maija Rossi and Harri Kalha. They were both referring to Judith Butler's theory of social construction and performativity of gender. Indeed, the most important book for me from this time was Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990). I was a believer in the power of images, and had strong faith in revolutionizing gender balance and unravelling the concept of gender through images defying the heteronormative matrix.

These days, I continue working with feminism in the field of art as a curator, and as a director of a non-profit art space. During the past few years, my feminism has been re-contextualising within feminist new materialist and affect theories.¹⁶ My interest in new materialist thinking arose originally from the field of art. Through focus on lives of objects, characteristics of materials, and our co-existence with the more-than-human world, new materialist themes appeared in exhibitions such as *dOCUMENTA (13)* in 2012; publications such as "Speculation" issue of *Texte zur Kunst* in March 2013, *The Object: Documents of contemporary art* (2014) edited by Antony Hudek and *Materiality: Documents of contemporary art* (2015) edited by Petra Lange-Berndt; and talks, such as "New Materialisms: Reconfiguring the object" at Tate Modern in May 2016.

¹⁶ In this research, I am focusing on new materialism instead of historical materialism. Following how Jane Bennett puts it, I am referring to materialism in the tradition of Democritus-Epicurus-Spinoza-Diderot-Deleuze, more than Hegel-Marx-Adorno (2010, xiii). A critique of capitalism and neoliberal politics does encompass both of these traditions, yet in the former it appears not as a point of departure but more as a parallel narrative which is acknowledged but not necessarily interrogated.

But above all, I have learned about new materialism from the artistic practices of Essi Kausalainen and mirko nikolić, both of whom also approach the topic from a feminist new materialist perspective.¹⁷ Essi Kausalainen has in her performative practice been collaborating with various nonhuman entities, such as plants, minerals and fungi, for a longer period of time [fig. 3]. In a discussion with curator Caroline Picard, Kausalainen describes her practice of making work as part of what she understands to be an assemblage of various human and nonhuman participants, learning this ecosystemic idea from the plants that she has studied and observed (Kausalainen & Picard 2016). In her practice, Kausalainen engages in a dialogue with her surroundings together with human and nonhuman participants, searching for ways of connecting, learning and understanding – being and sharing. I collaborated with Kausalainen as part of both *Only the Lonely* and *Good Vibrations*. The practice of mirko nikolić is also based on our relations with various earth beings and our economico-ethico-political existence among other actors in the more-than-



fig. 3. Essi Kausalainen, *Soil*, performance at Frankfurt Kunstverein, 2014. Image: Pietro Pellini.

¹⁷ In the article “Speculative *Before* the Turn: Reintroducing Feminist Materialist Performativity” (2015) Cecilia Åberg, Kathrin Thiele and Iris van der Tuin critically analyse the relations between the allegedly “masculine” lines of thought of speculative realism and object oriented ontologies, and (feminist) new materialist theory, mapping a zig-zagging of genealogies behind each movement.

human-world. In his PhD research, nikolić locates his practice as “posthumanist art–philosophy space of shared theoretico-practical experimentation” (2017, 9). I collaborated with nikolić in *Good Vibrations*. What I have been inspired by in the form of collaborating in Essi’s as well as mirko’s practices, is the level of reciprocity both artists in their individual projects practice towards certain nonhuman entities. In these artists’ practices, the term collaboration is not used lightly to for example justify a use of nonhuman elements (such as plants or minerals) as the material of a work, but rather, it concerns genuine aspiration to tune into another being’s frequency and way of existing. For example, in Kausalainen’s practice, the collaboration has been building on research, observation, and a deep understanding of how plants function, communicate and think. The works that the artist has produced as part of this work, have been based on encountering the other, for sample a plant, by using attempting to use their tools of communication. Also in mirko’s practice, the material others appear often as subjects the work of art is created for; the artist also often returns the organic nonhuman entities that might be part of his work, to the place they were obtained from. Collaborating equals here above all being-with, becoming-with, and getting-in-touch-with. Further, the collaboration is not only based on horizontal approaches, but it is also an ethical point of departure.

During the research process, new materialist thinking has become a foundation of my thinking regarding vibrant materiality of art, our embodied encounters with art, agency of nonhuman entities, and the summoning of vibrant energies. I have been influenced by Jane Bennett’s views on material vibrancy, which I discuss further while contemplating the vibrancy of art in chapters five, six and seven. As is clear by now, my thesis is not a philosophical project but rather, a curatorial one.

Nevertheless, my arguments do rely and contribute to a certain extent on lines of inquiry in philosophy and critical theory, that have been named new materialism (Coole & Frost 2010), feminist materialism (Alaimo & Hekman 2008), critical posthumanism (Braidotti 2013), feminist matter-realism (Braidotti 2011), and object-oriented ontology (Harman 2005).

What has been interesting to me in the process of defining my position, is the colliding of allegedly conflicting approaches of poststructuralist theorists and new materialist and affect theorists. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman present the emergence of what they call feminist materialism as a reaction to negligence of poststructuralist feminists toward lived bodies and the materiality they inhabit (2008, 3-4). Similarly, the turn to affect has been to large extent presented as a counter-reaction to the abstraction and immateriality of phenomena presented by poststructuralist theory, and as *a return* to bodily matter, which has been treated in terms of constructionisms as part of poststructuralist and deconstructive views (e.g. Clough 2010, 206; for more detailed discussion, see ch. 4). In the end, much like Clare Hemmings (2005), I do not see these two areas as contradicting as presented by some theorists (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003; Massumi 2002; 2015; Clough 2010). For example, while reading into Judith Butler's theory, I never read it as if her theory would diminish the materiality of the lived body. I understood the heteronormative matrix she describes as a violently physical, and indeed, *material* force compelling the possible, intelligible and acceptable ways of performing gender and sexuality in everyday life. I understood this above all as a physical and material event and process, as Butler argued further in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993). Thus, my current view on the topic is, that there are indeed discursive social and cultural structures that affect an individual's ability to act, and this ability is very much tied to our material and embodied existence.¹⁸

I do not have an activist feminist background, but have always practiced my feminism through work with art – first as an art historian, then as a curator. Having become a feminist in academia, to me feminist theory has always been a tool for rearranging understanding of the world – and thus, the world itself – in terms of how power is distributed. To me, feminism is about uncovering, pointing out, and transforming culturally, historically and socially constructed power relations regarding gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality, generation, and ability. This

¹⁸ Alaimo and Hekman (2008, 6) name the deconstruction of the material/discursive dichotomy, without privileging either, as one of the main aims of new materialist feminist research.

thesis as a whole describes my approach to feminism, which is in a constant flux, rearranging its definition in relation to social and cultural changes. For myself, a quote by feminist film studies scholar Anu Koivunen summarises what is important in different strands of feminist research: “The different choices of research questions, theories, concepts and disciplinary allies witness an ongoing and fierce debate on what is good feminist research, what kind of research is needed now and *what kind of knowledge has most transformational potential or political power*” (2010, 23; my emphasis). For me, it is the aspect of transformation that remains at the core of feminist activity, theory and politics, and this aspect is also at the core of this thesis in the context of art.

One starting point for this research has been the so-called boom of blockbuster exhibitions at major art museums and institutions presenting feminist art and/or art made by women, beginning in 2005.¹⁹ Taking into consideration that these exhibitions with feminist themes and frameworks started emerging specifically at major art institutions and museums, and around the same period of time, it is fair to talk about a refreshed interest in histories of feminist art, the work of women artists, and at least in some cases, actual interest to discuss and develop work on gender balance in museum collections and exhibition programmes. The boom of feminist/women artists’ exhibitions was soon followed by proliferation in writing about these exhibitions, as well as about relations between feminism, art, and

¹⁹ A list assembled by Hilary Robinson (2013, 129): 2005: *MOT Annual 2005: Life Actually, The Works of Contemporary Japanese Women*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan. *La Costilla Maldita*, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Gran Canaria. *Konstfeminism: Strategier och effekter i Sverige från 1970-talet till idag*, Dunkers Kulturhus, Helsingborg, Sweden. 2007: *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA. *Global Feminisms*, The Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA. *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 Years of Art and Feminism*, Museo de Bellas Artes Bilbao, Bilbao, Spain. *A Batalla dos Xéneros/ Gender Battles*, Centro Galego de Arte Contemporanea, Santiago de Compostela, Spain. 2009: *elles@centrepompidou*, The Pompidou Centre, Paris, France. *REBELLE. Art and Feminism 1969-2009*, Museum Voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem, The Netherlands. *Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe*, Museum Moderner Kunst Siftung Ludwig Wien, Vienna, Austria. 2010: *Donna: Avanguardia Femminista Negli Anni '70 dalla Sammlung Verbund di Vienna*, Galleria Nazionale D’Arte Moderna, Rome, Italy. *Med Viljann ad Vopni – Endurlit 1970-1980 (The Will as a Weapon – Review 1970-1980)*, Listasafn Reykjavíkur, Reykjavík, Iceland. *Žen d’Art: The Gender History of Art in the Post-Soviet Space: 1989-2009*, Moscow Museum of Modern Art, Russia. 2011: *Dream and Reality: Modern and Contemporary Women Artists from Turkey*, The Istanbul Modern, Turkey.

feminist curating in general.²⁰ Referring to the rapid increase of both exhibitions and projects on feminism, art, and feminist curating, as well as the writing on them, according to curator and cultural critic Elke Krasny, we can definitely speak of a feminist turn in curating (2015, 69n1).

This research focuses on unravelling this feminist turn in curating, and how it relates to discussions and practices of contemporary curating. My argument throughout this thesis is that there is a space for a feminist point of view in the current theorisation of contemporary curating and the notion of the curatorial. Even though politics, and political positions, are often brought up as part of writing about curatorial practices, I have not found texts where a feminist political position would be discussed as part of the theorisation on the curatorial. Parallel to this, I have sought to unravel and emphasize the coexistence of *the feminist* and *the curatorial*. I argue, that the curatorial context enables us to expand discussions on curating and feminist thought beyond the gender of the artist or the curator, and beyond an art historical approach of curating thematic exhibitions on feminism, feminist art, or women artists' work. I argue, that bringing the feminist within the curatorial allows us to expand the existing discussions on the topic, and to talk about curating and

²⁰ Elke Krasny presents these texts and publications in her list produced in the aftermath of the boom in exhibitions on feminist and women's art (2015, 69n1): 'Curatorial Strategies' issue of *n.paradoxa: international feminist art journal* (2006), edited by Renee Baert; Katy Deepwell's essay "Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices Since the 1970s" (2006); *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2010), *Politics in a Glass Case. Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (2013); *Women's:Museum. Curatorial Politics in Feminism, Education, History, and Art* (2013), *n.paradoxa's A Chronological List of International Exhibitions on Women Artists and Feminist art Practices* (<http://www.ktpress.co.uk/pdf/feministartexhibitions.pdf>) (2013). And these symposia and conferences: *Dialogues and Debates Symposium on Feminist Positions in Contemporary Visual Arts* (1999) hosted by Künstlerinnenstiftung Höge, Bremen; *Furious Gaze* conference (2008) at Centro Cultural Montehermoso Kulturunea; *Frauen:Museum: Zwischen Sammlungsstrategie und Sozialer Plattform (Women's:Museum: Between Collection Strategies and Social Platforms)* (2010) at the Vienna Library; *Civil Partnerships? Queer and Feminist Curating* conference (2012) at Tate Modern London, *The First Supper Symposium* (2012) at Handverkeren Kurs- og Konferansesenter; *Curating Feminism Conference* (2014) hosted by Sydney College of the Arts, School of Letters, Arts and Media and The Power Institute, University of Sydney; *Feminist Turn in Curating* panel at the *Curating Everything (curating as symptom)* symposium (2015) at Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst Zurich.

feminist thought in terms of *art* and *ways of working with art*, rather than setting feminism as a framework that we want art to fit in.

Further, I contextualise feminist curating through affect studies as a potential site for creating transformative energies. I argue that the notion of affect can help us put the transformative power of feminism in practice in artistic and curatorial projects, in which transformative settings and situations for the *sticking* of affects (Ahmed 2010) is allowed and encouraged to happen. In the very foundations, my approach in this research to knowledge is related to Donna Haraway's theorisation of situated knowledges (1988), as well as to Alison Jaggar's feminist critique of epistemology from the perspective of emotion (1989). I do not imagine to provide an absolute objective truth about feminist curating as an outcome of this thesis, and quite contrary, I'm proposing this alternative view to feminist curating exactly *from my position as an independent curator seeking a way to talk about a practice*. Further, following Jaggar's thinking, I am recognising the potency of emotion as an essential part in both formulating the starting points for the research, and as part of its implementation.

Affect and emotion

When I began presenting the research at peer seminars at my university, I was repeatedly asked whether my research discussed participatory art. At first I was surprised by these questions, but understood they were related to the notion of affect which I spoke about in a way that made it seem it was a feature of the artworks I was looking at. Before defining the concepts of affect and emotion in the framework of this research, I'm making a distinction between the topic of affect, participation and relational aesthetics.

The route towards the topics of engagement and participation with contemporary art was laid by the emergence of site-specific art and public art projects employing institutional critique and community-based methods and practices, as described by

Miwon Kwon in her seminal study *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002). Kwon presents an art historical narrative beginning with the emergence of site-specific practices in the late 1960s to late 1990s community-based art projects taking place in public space, creating the narrative through tight linkages between art and the socio-economic structures (capitalism) art is necessarily part of. Kwon calls for art and research practices maintaining a long-term relational approach of linking sites, people and the social structures these belong to, while working site-specifically on individual projects.

The term relational aesthetics was coined by curator and philosopher Nicolas Bourriaud in late 1990s. In *Relational Aesthetics* (1998/2002) Bourriaud describes socially oriented practices of contemporary artists working on participatory forms of art, such as Rirkrit Tiravanija, Philippe Parreno and Liam Gillick. Bourriaud defines relational aesthetics as “aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt” (2002, 112); and relational art as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space” (2002, 113). In Bourriaud’s view, the artist became a facilitator or an interlocutor working on relations between viewers and the setting they created. As curator and critic Helena Reckitt notes, within relational aesthetics, also the viewer’s position is negotiated anew from “a receiver” or spectator of a static work into an active participant in co-creating meaning and realising an artwork together with the artists and other participants (2013, 136). However, Reckitt notes that at the same time, Bourriaud neglects recognition of what he labels as relational art to various feminist art practices from the 1970s to 1990s, as well as the fact that what he understands as relational, employs to a large extent acts traditionally defined as feminine, such as care work, cooking, and maintenance work. Further, what Bourriaud seems to be blind to, is the political aspects related to gender politics, which however, exist in much of the work he presents (2013, 138-140). As Reckitt notes, “Bourriaud’s disembodied and affectless conception of the social realm ignores feminist insights into how people come to

understand themselves in relation to other sexed bodies, simultaneously as objects and subjects” (2013, 140).

Art historian and critic Claire Bishop reacted to Bourriaud’s *Relational Aesthetics* in 2004 with the essay “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics”, by criticizing above all the focus Bourriaud has on *form* in the expense of *content* as part of theorizing relational art: “Bourriaud wants to equate aesthetic judgment with an ethicopolitical judgment of the relationships produced by a work of art. But how do we measure or compare these relationships? The *quality* of the relationships in ‘relational aesthetics’ are never examined or called into question” (2004, 65). It must be mentioned, that also Bishop takes up the legacy of feminist artists neglected by Bourriaud (2004, 63). However, Reckitt notes that despite this, Bishop herself repeats Bourriaud’s mistake, not including any essays on feminist participatory art practices in the reader *Participation* she edited in 2006 (Reckitt 2013, 140). Also, in a discussion between Julia Bryan-Wilson and Bishop, Bryan-Wilson seeks to receive a clear reply on Bishop’s view on the significance of feminist art practices in her research area, finally receiving as a reply, that even if Bishop is interested in all of the areas feminist practices concern (“all sorts of theoretical, philosophical, and political possibilities, including a critique of how class and gender are co-articulated ... not limited to demanding to see more women artists in exhibitions ... labor, and reproduction, and the public/private divide, and political economy...”), she is not interested in researching these phenomena “through a feminist lens” (2012). Bishop has later continued discussing the topic of participation in her study *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012), by both historicizing socially engaged participatory art in relation to futurism and dada, as well as providing critical paradigms for assessing the value of much of contemporary participatory art practices.

We can then recognise affect as an essential aspect that helps to create a connection between a work of art and a viewer in both of these approaches. Here, the affect and affectivity of art are presented as part of the artworks’ participatory or co-produced qualities. In this research, though, I am examining workings of affect in *an*

encounter between a work of art and a viewer, independent of whether the work of art is participatory by nature (it might be argued, that all art is). My focus is not, then, on interactive or participatory art, understood as art forms which aim at engaging the audience in becoming part of creating the work, such as much of the art Bourriaud and Bishop write about.

In *Visual Culture as Objects and Affects* (2013), Jorella Andrews and Simon O’Sullivan unravel the relationship between affect and relational aesthetics in separate essays as well as through dialogue. In her essay “Intending Objects and Signs ‘Which Have No Meaning’”, Andrews writes about artworks, also stemming from art practices of the 1990s, which convey strong connections to objects and materialities while simultaneously supporting nonnarrative structures. Here Andrews writes particularly about the work of Rosalind Nashashibi and Jayne Parker. Andrews defines the tendency in their work as a distinct approach from relational practices described by Bourriaud, emerging at the same period of time. According to Andrews,

At issue here are diverse art practices that seemed to share the following characteristic: directly or indirectly, as with much postmodern and indeed much earlier twentieth-century art, they all challenged the (supposedly) elitist idea of the artwork as an object of art-for-art’s-sake contemplation, or as an object of consumption or exchange within the circuits of capital. Against these tendencies, they attempted to reinstate the social, political, and ethical efficacy of art. But they did so without resorting to the oppositional or didactic message-based strategies of much twentieth-century and contemporary activist or protest art (2013, 37-38).

Whereas relational art in Bourriaud’s definition focuses on facilitating human relations and creating shifts in them, Andrews is interested in works which appear to be more concerned with effects of form and materiality, and where it might not be so obvious whether they carry political, social or ethical values (2013, 39). Further, Andrews argues that the aesthetically oriented work described above, is

more philosophically and existentially radical than those works foregrounded by Bourriaud. ... Because by focusing attention on the lifeworlds of objects, and on *intercorporeality* instead of *intersubjectivity*, a powerful sense of agency is opened up that does not appear to be immediately directed to, or in service of, purely human concerns. Instead of creating “interactive, user-friendly and relational concepts”, the aesthetics associated with these works call into question the anthropocentric

assumptions that habitually undergird everyday life, thought, and action—an anthropocentrism that relational aesthetics also affirms” (2013, 39).

It is to a large extent these qualities of artworks described by Andrews above, that I am thinking about throughout this thesis: notions of materiality of and in the artworks, a sense of agency, and affective qualities attached both to this materiality and to this agency. Much like new materialist art historian Katve-Kaisa Kontturi has put it when describing her research as following flows of process at studios, exhibition spaces and her own writing desk: “What my followings strive for is a research practice that cherishes the material qualities of art: a new materialism that appreciates matter as movement and matter capable of transformation and creation” (2012, 13). This is much how I see the role of art in its material being as an intersecting thought, and as such, a method of thinking through art in this research. Further, I am thinking about the relations we can establish with these works and the potential of what these relations can do to us.

In this research, then, I am discussing affect in relation to Spinozist and Deleuze-Guattarian understanding of affect. According to this view, affect resides in a work of art, existing as a bloc of sensations, as intensity, virtuality, and vitality, and taking form in our relations between different bodies (human and nonhuman) by impacting our ability to act (Deleuze & Guattari 1994; 2013). In thinking about the relations of art and affect, I have been influenced particularly by Simon O’Sullivan’s (2001; 2006; 2013) readings of affect in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. The research relates to a vaster turn to affect (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003; Clough 2007; Leys 2011), which took place in the field of cultural studies, psychology and neuroscience in the late 1990s, which I am discussing mainly in the framework of feminist theorisation of emotion and affect (Ahmed 2010, 2014; Hemmings 2005, 2012), as well as feminist new materialist theory (Alaimo & Hekman 2008; Coole & Frost 2010; Barrett & Bolt 2013).

According to Sara Ahmed, “emotions shape the very surfaces of bodies, which take shape through the repetition of actions over time, as well as through orientations towards and away from others. Indeed, attending to emotions might show us how

all actions are reactions, in the sense that what we do is shaped by the contact we have with others. In Spinoza's terms, emotions shape what bodies can do, as 'the modifications of the body by which the power of action on the body is increased or diminished' (Spinoza 1959: 85)" (2014, 4). In this thesis, I am writing mainly about how art might make us *feel*, and not so much about what it might *mean*. The reactions described above by Ahmed (and Spinoza), are to a large extent in this thesis thought about in the context of art: I am interested in exploring what our bodies can do as a consequence of being in contact with art.

To me, attending to issues concerning emotion appears as a political gesture in itself. As Ahmed notes: "To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous. Feminist philosophers have shown us how the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body (Spelman 1989; Jaggar 1996). Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement" (2014, 3). Even if I do make a difference between the concepts of affect, emotion and feeling, in this research the concepts are deeply connected particularly in terms of their political potential, as described by Ahmed (2010; 2014) and Hemmings (2005; 2012).

Transformative energies

Throughout this thesis I am talking about the possibility of transformation in our affective encounters with art. In my view, the aim and the potential of transformation is the most essential aspect of both feminist thought and practice, likewise of theorization of affect. In this thesis, I discuss the notions of creating energies and transforming in the intersections of art, affect, and feminisms. All of these fields connect to augmenting our abilities to act in relation to other bodies, as is already described above.

The notion of energy relates here to both Deleuze and Guattari's definition of affect as intensity, sensation and virtuality (1987; 1994), and to political theorist Jane Bennett's concept of vibrant matter (2010). For Bennett, material vibrancy is a term that allows us to discuss agency of nonhuman entities and materialities, similarly to Deleuze's use of the virtual, Michel Foucault's use of the unthought, or Henry David Thoreau's use of the Wild. Vibrant matter is a force that is real and powerful, but at the same time intrinsically resistant to representation (Bennett 2010, xvi). As Bennett puts it: "What I am calling impersonal affect or material vibrancy is not a spiritual supplement or "life force" added to the matter said to house it. Mine is not a vitalism in the traditional sense; I equate affect with materiality, rather than posit a separate force that can enter and animate a physical body" (2010, xiii). Reading Deleuze and Guattari alongside Bennett, I have come to understand affect as vibration and energy existing as part of works of art, releasing itself in our encounters with them. My approach comes out as an interplay between these views: between art, matter and objects – and affect, virtuality and energy.

To me it has been important, that in Bennett's writing on vibrant matter, the political is framed within the nonhuman; for her, the vibrancy of matter and things is not something projected on these entities by humans, but it really is about the vibrancy and vitality of the matter itself. In this thesis, I am giving much agency to artworks as entities which may touch us, move us, and possibly, transform us. In the framework of curating and feminist thought, I am at the end of the thesis thinking about the aspect of transformative energies specifically in relation to curator Renée Baert's understanding of *enchantment*, and Catherine de Zegher's idea of the exhibition space as a space for *amazement*.

Aims, questions and methods

In this research, I aim to shift the paradigm of feminist thought and curating from discussing exhibitions made in museum institutions about feminist art and/or art made by women. I aim to create a space for discussing feminist thought and

curating outside a feminist art historical context. As part of this, I also aim to bring a feminist approach as part of a contemporary curatorial discourse, and particularly, to the realm of the curatorial.

The second aim is to propose a model for feminist curatorial practice, in which feminist politics is embedded in the curatorial practice itself and manifests in the undertakings of the curator, focusing particularly on the notion of creating transformative energies as part of the curatorial process. I draft this proposal with the help of affect theory as well as feminist new materialist theory. I aim to position the aspect of transformation at the core of this feminist practice, alongside the affective notions of virtuality, becoming, and the *not-yet*.

My research questions are: how is feminist thought present in “mainstream” contemporary curatorial discourses? What are the discourses of the feminist curatorial field at the moment? How can we expand current discourses and practices on the field of feminist thought and curating? What would it mean to talk about feminist curatorial practices in the context of the curatorial? And could an aspect of affective transformation function as a key in theorising a feminist curatorial practice, which would stem above all from the art exhibited and the artists’ practices the curator is collaborating with?

In the following chapters, I am employing different methods in order to draft a feminist curatorial practice based on thinking through art, and aiming at creating transformative energies through affective encounters. As curator and researcher Suzana Milevska has noted, feminist research itself can be considered a methodology, as it is seen within humanities and social sciences (2013, 162). Despite the overarching critique of art historical contextualisation of feminist curating, my approach in this thesis is affirmative. My methodological approach has been influenced by Rosi Braidotti’s posthuman affirmative politics, also connected essentially to new materialist and vital materialist thinking (2013; 2015). Building on Spinozist and Deleuze-Guattarian monistic and vital-materialist accounts, Braidotti states:

Here is the punchline of contemporary *zoe*/posthuman neo-Spinozist materialist politics: affirmative ethics defines our politics. Given that the ethical good is equated with radical relationality, aiming at affirmative empowerment, the ethical ideal is to increase one's ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others. Oppositional consciousness as a reactive mode is replaced by affirmative praxis and political subjectivity is redefined as a process or assemblage that actualizes this ethical propensity. This position aspires to the creation of affirmative alternatives by working through the negative instances so as to collectively transform them into affirmative practices (2015, 34-35).

For Braidotti, affirmative politics is a process of transforming negative affects into productive and sustainable praxis, disengaging from negativity and connecting to “creative affirmation and the actualization of virtual potentials” (2015, 53).

Affirmative politics is an approach embraced by feminist new materialist theory. As Alaimo and Hekman describe their material feminist approach (2008, 6), the attempt is to build on, rather than to abandon, the criticised approaches and points of departure of previous feminist research.

While I criticize the current art historical approach, which I see as a narrow understanding of the possible alliances between feminist thought and practices of curating, I am not claiming that the exhibitions presenting feminist art and/or art made by women artists are *wrong*, or that these projects should be dismissed. I do, of course, hope that these exhibitions are being produced also in the future, and also that the realisation of these exhibitions will lead to concrete changes in the policies of museum institutions.²¹ What I am arguing in this thesis though, is that there must exist discussion on other ways of working curatorially with feminisms than the art historical feminist approach, secured within museum walls, or, to use Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry's formulation (2013), sealed within the glass case in a museum, where it is preserved and historicized. If feminist practice and theory aims at transforming societies, there needs to be other forms of feminist practices within the curatorial that can be discussed. There needs to be formats that can be

²¹ Perhaps the next step now, ten years after the beginning of the boom of feminist blockbuster exhibitions, would be to follow-up the museum institutions that hosted them, and inquire how these institutions are working with gender balance at the moment, and how the feminist exhibitions otherwise affected the functioning of the institutions.

employed by the dozens and dozens of fresh curators emerging from the curatorial post-graduate programmes each year, who will not acquire the position of a museum curator. I propose, that bringing feminist thought and work with art outside museum institutions, and in the context of independent curatorial practices and contemporary curatorial discourses, is the first step.

What I am searching for in this thesis is alternative discourses for feminist curatorial practices, and what I propose as an outcome, a feminist curatorial practice of creating transformative energies, again, is one *possible* strategy among others. Other practices and strategies might include for example collaborative and activist approaches. The practice I propose, based on the concept of affect and a process of enabling affect, means that my focus is on *hopes* of enabling something that I cannot guarantee that will happen; there is a certain element of speculation that overarches the concept of affect, as will be discussed later. As part of constructing my approach, I am partly looking at practices of curators in highly privileged positions – curators curating large-scale touring exhibitions, biennials, documentas. In these cases, though, what I am examining, are the curatorial approaches, methods and strategies they have used above all in their curatorial thinking with and through art. This is a tool we can employ in any feminist curatorial practice – it is not bound to an institution, a budget, nor the aim of needing to present an art historical narrative presenting the right references in the right way. The focus here is more on the curatorial practice and thinking, and its closeness with art. This research should be seen more as a project of *making space* for other kinds of feminist approaches, and more specifically, ones arising *from* independent curatorial practices. My starting point is, that all of these feminist approaches to exhibition making, curatorial practices, and work in art institutions should exist parallel to each other.²²

²² As a practical example, one of the first things I did in my role as a director of a non-profit art space run by an artist association, I began a mapping of gender balance in the art space's exhibition programming from previous years. This way, the future programming can be planned based on these statistics, and any future errors regarding the topic can't be made.

In April 2017, I was at Tate Modern in London to see Fabrizio Terranova's film *Donna Haraway: Storytelling for earthly survival* (2017).²³ During a talk between Haraway and the director after the film, Haraway inspiringly noted, that her thinking is embedded in revolting and acting: in a wish to move forward from merely describing the state of the world. In the introduction to *Vibrant Matter* (2010), Jane Bennett is on the same path while stating, that we need both critique and positive formulations of alternatives (2010, xv). While working on this research, I have aimed at being able to do the same, even if in a smaller scale: I haven't wanted to stop at observing, describing and criticising the state of things, but I have sought after alternatives in order to do things differently as a practicing curator, and to try and put my theory into practice.

Chapter outline

I begin chapter two by presenting my approach to curating and the realm of the curatorial within this thesis. I analyse existing writing on curatorial practices and the philosophes of the curatorial, while pointing out the discourses I find essential for the development of contemporary feminist curatorial practices: the emergence of the independent curator; curating as an educational practice and knowledge production; the shift from the topic of curatorship to the practice of curating; and finally, the theorisation of the curatorial. While I define curating as a practice larger than the endeavour of making an exhibition happen – taking form as constant dialogue with artists and the art scene, and manifesting as much through discussions, research, and writing – I am also primarily discussing curating within the exhibition format. The chapter as a whole presents the current theorisation on the curatorial, in order to show that feminisms are to a large extent missing from these governing narratives.

²³ <https://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/film/donna-haraway-story-telling-earthly-survival> (Accessed 06/04/18).

In chapter three I present current discourses on feminisms and curatorial thought through an analysis on recent writing on the topic.²⁴ The structure of this chapter relies on what in my MA thesis I presented as three (overlapping) modes of feminist approaches to curating: working on gender representation in exhibition programmes and collections; working with feminisms thematically as a topic of curated projects; and employing a feminist curatorial strategy where feminism is embedded and manifests in various ways in the practice. This chapter as a whole presents the current discourses on feminist thought and curating, in order to show that the focus is primarily on art historical approaches, and feminist curating is as a rule discussed through analysis of exhibitions presenting feminist art and/or art made by women.

In chapter four I move on toward presenting solutions to the issues I have brought up in the previous chapters. Here I present definitions and theorisation of affect, and move on to discussing its political potential as part of feminist work with art. I begin by introducing the two main strands of affect studies: the biopsychological strand relying on Silvan Tomkins' theorisation of affect, and the Deleuze-Guattarian strand, where affect is understood more as a force, intensity, and virtuality as part of Deleuze's concept of becoming. I also present affect studies within a feminist context, where the transformative aspect of affect is brought to the fore, particularly through the writing of Sara Ahmed and Clare Hemmings.

Chapters five, six and seven focus on presenting the alternative context for discussing feminisms and curating: a curatorial practice relying on the affective and transformative abilities of art. In chapter five I bring the concept of affect within the

²⁴ It needs to be noted, that at the very moment of writing this thesis, a lot appears to be happening again in the field of feminisms and contemporary art. New aspects that have possibly come out in these recent writings haven't been taken as part of the research because of practical reasons regarding the time schedule of the research. To name a few instances, Jan van Eyck Academie in the Netherlands held a reading group on feminist curating in February 2018 (<https://www.janvaneyck.nl/en/news/feminist-curating>, accessed 19/09/2018), feminism was the topic of two issues of *e-flux journal* (issue 92, 6/2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92>, accessed 19/09/2018, and issue 93, 9/2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/>, accessed 19/09/2018), and online publication *Feminisms* edited by L'Internationale Online came out in late spring 2018 (<http://www.internationaleonline.org/bookshelves/feminisms>, accessed 19/09/2018).

context of contemporary art. I link workings of affect with artistic practices, and present how the concept is connected to my understanding of both art, curating and feminism. The messiness and stickiness of affect is the stuff that keeps these three fields of thought and practice attached within this research. I conclude chapter five by presenting my curatorial process with the exhibition *Only the Lonely*. I begin chapter six by contemplating on energies and vibrations entailing transformative elements, and how these forces may link to works of art. I then present my curatorial process with the exhibition *Good Vibrations*. I bring the main topics of the research together in discussing feminist curatorial practices beyond representation with the use of affective and transformative potency and potential of art. I conclude the thesis by summarizing my thoughts on the close linkages between feminist thought and the realm of the curatorial, and present how discussing feminist thought as part of contemporary curatorial discourses can expand the current discussions from the art historical confinement, and open up new ways of understanding the transformative potential of feminist curating. I will also present how the knowledge produced in this thesis may be developed further in the future.

2 The curatorial

This chapter is a mapping of how, since the late 1990s and early 2000s, academic and non-academic writing on curatorial practices has rapidly increased, along with the professionalization of the field, and development of how curatorial work has been gaining significance in a larger cultural and socio-political context, extending beyond exhibition-making in museums and galleries, and even beyond the field of art. Even though curating, as it exists today, is then a relatively new field of practice²⁵ as well as scholarly research²⁶, the first histories of curating have already been written (Obrist 2008; O'Neill 2012). Rather than attempting to rewrite a history of curating, the purpose of this chapter is to build a basis for discussing feminist curatorial practices in relation to discourses of contemporary curating. What has been formative for this research and the development of the questions presented, has been a search for a way to talk about curating and feminist thought that connects to the field of contemporary curating; and simultaneously, the personal quest to find a feminist curatorial framework I could be able to relate to. Reading literature on feminist thought and curating, I have struggled to situate myself in the existing discourses. I'm discussing this in detail in chapter three. This chapter opens up the gaps where feminist thought is missing from the mainstream curatorial discourses.²⁷

²⁵ The first curatorial study programme started in 1987 at École du Magasin in Grenoble. The same year the Independent Study Program at Whitney Museum of American Art in New York renamed its Art History/Museum Studies course to Curatorial and Critical Studies.

²⁶ In the UK context, searching from the EThOS database, the first PhD research relating to contemporary views on curating is from 1997, *A study of audience relationships with interactive computer-based visual artworks in gallery settings, through observation, art practice, and curation* by C.E. Beryl Graham, University of Sunderland. MPhil and PhD programme Curatorial/Knowledge started in 2006 at Goldsmiths University of London. Zurich University of the Arts in collaboration with University of Reading started a collaborative MPhil and PhD programme in 2012.

²⁷ By mainstream I mean discourses that do not present a specific contextualising in terms of their approach, e.g. "political curating" or "feminist curating", but present themselves as general discussion on the field.

I begin by opening up the narrative of the emergence of the independent curator, as this development remains in the focus of the research.²⁸ I have chosen this focus because independent curatorship is more or less non-existent in current research around curating and feminist thought, hereby aiming at opening up new routes for the discussion. I continue with discussing exhibitions. In this research, the focus is mostly on curatorial work with exhibition format as part of independent curatorial practices, and not, for example on discursive curatorial work with publications and events, or on curatorial work within commercial galleries, museum collections or educational programming. I am also briefly reviewing aspects concerning the so-called educational turn, which took place in the curatorial field in the early 2000s, as it has greatly influenced the generation of curators at the moment emerging in the art world with work experience from biennials, kunsthallen, independent practices and other self-run initiatives, and the overall non-profit art scene. After this, I am mapping the discourses within the field of contemporary curating more generally.

I conclude this chapter by discussing the concept of the curatorial, which I have in the course of this research recognised as another missing, yet productive point of departure, when talking about curatorial practices in a feminist framework. Dancer and choreographer Yvonne Rainer has used the word 'exhibition' in a fluid sense, meaning not only the actual event of an exhibition, but also the actions and processes involved in it (Steeds 2014, 18)²⁹. Similarly, the concept of the curatorial shifts focus to the processes and ideologies related to the various aspects of curating.

²⁸ 'Independent' refers here to independent curatorial practice as a freelancer, as opposed to curatorial practices affiliated with museums or other art institutions. It may well be discussed, if the independent curator can be seen as independent in any other aspect.

²⁹ Unfortunately, Steeds doesn't provide a reference or a further context to Rainer's comment.

Changes in the role of the curator

This research is little concerned with questions concerning the role of the curator, the focus being more on art, ways of working with art, as well as curatorial thinking and processes that we can use in order to challenge the ways we work with art and artists. However, the fundamental changes in the role of the curator – from a caretaker of a museum collection to an author, a commissioner, a collaborator – have strongly affected the ways we can talk about contemporary curatorial practices today. I will therefore briefly discuss the main topics and literature concerning this discourse.

Emergence of the independent curator

In the late 1960's a museum curator's occupation and tasks began developing from caretaking to authoring. Karsten Schubert (2000) discusses this narrative through the development of the museum institution from the French Revolution to the late 1990s, and addresses the role of the museum curator in the framework of the social and historical significance of museum institutions. Even though Schubert does not discuss the work of museum curators solely, what comes through in his study is that both changes in museum institutions and art practices have had an effect on the changes in tasks of the curator, the occupation transforming from a manager and a caretaker of collections to working primarily with exhibition production and collaborating with living artists. In a museological context, which Schubert's study represents, curatorial aspects are most often approached above all through discussing the *role* of the curator: what it was, what it is, and what it will possibly become (e.g. O'Neill & Fletcher 2007, 12).

Also Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak (1996) analyse the narrative from the point of view of the museum institution and its development, analysing the curator's role shifting into a creative field, where the curator inserts their subjectivity into the projects they curate, becoming an author alongside the artist. According to Heinich and Pollak, it has been different conditions in the field of art, such as changes in

how art and exhibitions are made, expansion of the field of exhibition making, and quite practical reasons such as increased authority in exhibition projects requiring a larger group of staff, that have led to the curator's role becoming that of an author. The traditional tasks of the curator being safeguarding, enriching, researching, and displaying a collection, Heinich and Pollak situate the potential and practical possibility of personalisation exclusively in the latter. As temporary exhibitions in museums became more sought after, the workload of the curator rose, and the presentation to public became more important. Hence, there was both a demand and potential space for development of the profession (1996, 235-236).

In a discussion published as part of Jens Hoffmann's *Show Time* (2013) curator Mary Jane Jacob recaps the discourse on changes in the curatorial field: "This is a process of many dimensions: physical, human, intellectual, political, ethical, spiritual, and more. Back when curating was about picking artworks and arranging them, employing the skills of connoisseurship and scholarship, taste ruled. Then it all got messier" (Hoffmann 2013, 244). Indeed, when exhibition making is less and less about selecting and organizing, and instead collaborating, discussing, researching, contextualising, theorizing, fund-gathering, commissioning, producing, communicating, and mediating, things can easily get messy. At the same time, curatorial work is perhaps less about connoisseurship in a traditional art historical sense, as emerging curators often do not hold previous degrees from the field of art, or at least the field of art history. It is very much in this messiness where my interests lie, and which I unravel further in the chapters to come.

Curators as auteurs and as stars

If the exhibition can be seen as the medium of making art known (Greenberg, Ferguson & Nairne 1996), it appears it has expanded to be also the medium of making curators known. Reading any anthology on curating, one will come across the topic of the *star curator* or the *jet set curator*, most often in relation to biennial culture and other mega-exhibitions, or, the emergence of the independent curator in

the form of the first (male) curators actively operating as such. These names include curators such as Walter Hopps, Pontus Hultén, Harald Szeemann and Seth Siegelaub. This discourse has very little to do with this research, and I'm bringing it up here briefly in relation to the history of independent curatorship. The canon-building of curators can also be thought of in relation to the canon-building of exhibitions, alongside the still relevant questions posed by feminist art historians: who is represented, who is not, and by what criteria?

The emergence of biennial culture alongside the globalisation of the art world during the late 1980's, has worked in favour of creating a canon of selected, innovative and influential curators. Indeed, according to Jens Hoffman, the biennial curator is the ultimate way leader of the contemporary art scene (2013, 11). According to Paul O'Neill, the increasing curatorial activity on international and transnational level through biennials and other recurring large-scale exhibitions has been the most evident transformation within contemporary curatorial practice within the past few decades (2012, 51). During the 1990s proliferation of new biennials awarded certain curators with a high profile, and this is where O'Neill detects also a turning point in the development toward a nomadic global curatorship, which he himself (though not completely explicitly) represents in the research. O'Neill notes, that the expansion of the biennial cultures also coincides with a proliferation of curator-centred publications and international curating conferences (2012, 5). The expansion of biennial culture didn't then only have impact on the development of the role of the independent curator, but it also enabled a more critical and detailed discussion on curatorial practices themselves.³⁰

³⁰ The biennial is a large field of study entailing several other large fields of study, such as the globalisation of the art world, post-colonial critique of making exhibitions and mega-exhibitions, contemporary art market, art and capitalism, and so forth. In the framework of this research, this is too vast an area to tackle. For critical reading on biennial curating, see e.g. *Biennials: Art on a Global Scale* (2010) by Sabine Vogel, *The Biennial Reader* (2010) edited by Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebø, *Biennials, Triennials, and documenta: The Exhibitions that Created Contemporary Art* (2016) by Charles Green and Anthony Gardner, and *The politics of contemporary art biennials: spectacles of critique, theory and art* (2017) by Panos Kompatsiaris.

Harald Szeemann is one of the curators who is most often brought up when talking about the emergence of independent curators, curators as authors, and curators as celebrities. Thinking about an art historical legacy, it is here that tables really seem to turn with regards to the role of the artist, and that of the curator. When monographs were previously written on artists only, from Szeemann on they have been written also on curators. Since early 2000s at least these monographs on curators have been published: *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition maker* (2006) edited by Hans-Joachim Müller; *Hou Hanru: On the mid-ground. Selected texts* (2006) edited by Yu Hsiao-Hwei; *Harald Szeemann: Individual methodology* (2007) edited by Florence Derieux; *Harald Szeemann: With by through because towards despite: Catalogue of All Exhibitions 1957-2005* (2007) by Tobia Bezzola and Roman Kurzmeyer, *Selected Maria Lind Writing* (2010) edited by Brian Kuan Wood; *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74* (2012) edited by Cornelia Butler; *Ways of curating* (2015) by Hans Ulrich Obrist; and *Everything you always wanted to know about curating but were afraid to ask* (2011) by Hans Ulrich Obrist.

Hans Ulrich Obrist's interview collection *A brief history of curating* was to respond to a lack of exhibition histories with focus on (the work of) curators. With his book of oral histories, consisting of eleven interviews with curators (two of whom are women), Obrist is determined to write a canon of curators. It is notable, that all of the curators interviewed by Obrist are, or were, curators in top positions in European or North American art capitals such as New York, London and Paris. As the curators are encouraged by Obrist to talk about their networks consisting of people working in high positions within art worlds in these cities (family and friends, who become colleagues and peers), a certain sense of privilege is unveiled. Obrist asks each interviewee several questions about their colleagues and peers. What the book highlights strongly, is the importance of networks of fellow curators, artists, writers and critics. Without this network, a curator cannot make it to the canon; to be in the canon, is to present one's position in relation to others of importance.

In relation to approaches introduced in preceding research such as *Thinking about exhibitions* (1996) edited by Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne and *The power of display* (1998) by Mary Anne Staniszewski, where the focus is on aesthetic and ideological structures and significances that emerge in exhibition settings, the focus in Obrist's interviews is above all on people. Here the starting point is the curator: how they became to be who they are, who their idols and peers were, who influenced them, who they worked with, and how their thinking about art and culture related to other curators' views. The aim of creating a curatorial canon is then explicit. Obrist starts each interview by asking about influences and curator idols, and for example in the interview with Lucy Lippard, comes back to this question over and over. When Lippard finally replies her main influence were the artists she was surrounded by in New York in the 1970s, and that she was not so interested in what curators were thinking (2008, 207) Obrist has to give up relating her to his references. In *Everything you always wanted to know about curating but were afraid to ask* (2011) and *Ways of curating* (2014), Obrist adds himself in the canon he has started writing, by unravelling his own path to arriving where he is at the top of the international art world, in the former publication with the help of artist and curator friends who act as his interviewers.³¹

The star curator cult and the general process of canon-building pose the same issues concerning power relations and hierarchies as art historical canons. As emphasized above, what Obrist's endeavour brings to the fore is the value judgements placed on a curator's position in the art world, as well as their connections. Clearly, this canon building is also gendered, as women do not reach high positions in the art world as easily as men.³² Further, the canon of the curators together with the celebrity cult

³¹ Paul O'Neill notes that Obrist's endeavour of writing a history of curating "displays an interest not only in establishing a curatorial history, but also a potential space for self-positioning". Through the interviews, curatorial innovations from the past are connected with Obrist's own practice, which is "positioned as their logical successor" (2012, 41).

³² In a research conducted by Association of Art Museum Directors in 2017, the results showed that a gender gap exists both in directorships in museums as well as in the salaries of museum directors, women holding less than half of the directorships, and women's salaries lagging behind men's. <https://aamd.org/our-members/from-the-field/gender-gap-report-2017> (Accessed 01/08/2018). In the spring of 2018 there has also been discussion on several influential women museum directors losing their jobs for vague reasons:

shift full emphasis on the person of the curator. A pointed work on the topic is Tanja Ostojic's performative piece *I'll be Your Angel* (2001-2002), in which the artist accompanied Harald Szeemann by staying by his side at all times during the opening of the 49th Venice Biennale, posing simultaneously as a muse, an angel, and a caretaker, but also embodying power relations between a male curator and a female artist. Ostojic's body art piece *Black Square on White* (2001) was also included in the project, as part of which her pubic hair was trimmed as a square, and kept unseen from the audience. Highlighting the hierarchical power structures, the artist kept a diary on the project, display of which was in the end denied by Szeemann.³³

What can be seen as a positive side to the first-person-stories, is that they've enabled to form knowledge on a field that simply hasn't existed as such before. Interviews with curators have been used as the basis in several anthologies on curatorial practice from the early 2000s. One of the vastest is the series *The producers: Contemporary curators in conversation* (2000-2002) organised by BAL TIC Centre for Contemporary Art. The series, consisting of five volumes, is edited by Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin, and it features several interviews with contemporary curators unravelling their projects and curatorial thinking, but focus is also on discussions. Thus, in addition to first-person-narratives, the series aims to open these up by contextualising them as part of other practices. Also Caroline Thea relies on interviews in her two volumes *On curating. Interviews with ten international curators* (2009) and *On curating 2: Paradigm shifts* (2016). Thea's starting point appears to be similar to Obrist's, in the sense that both aim to map out influential curators and create knowledge on their thinking and practice. The difference in Thea's approach to Obrist's is, that the interviewees include both female and male curators with backgrounds in different continents, including South America and Asia. Also, the interviews themselves focus on selected projects the curators have worked on, more than on the curators as influential personalities. Interview is also used as a method

https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/xw5eb3/female-museum-curators-fired-molesworth (Accessed 16/03/2018).

³³ <http://www.reactfeminism.org/entry.php?l=lb&id=123&e=t> (Accessed 01/08/2018). Also Angela Dimitrakaki writes about Ostojic's practice and this piece in relation to the hierarchical artist/curator relationship (2013a, 212-219).

in two anthologies, *Curating Subjects* (2007) and *Curating and the Educational Turn* (2010), edited by Paul O'Neill. O'Neill used interview as a method also in his PhD research on the development of contemporary discourses on curating (2007). The research was later edited into the publication *The culture of curating and the curating of culture(s)* (2012), which doesn't include the original interviews.

In the process of professionalization of the curatorial field, interview has become an essential method of creating curatorial knowledge (and also, knowledge about curators). While interview can be seen as an essential tool in gathering knowledge through oral histories in a field that is still relatively young and possibly searching for a solid footing, it simultaneously encourages creating a canon of curators important and influential enough to be interviewed about their curatorial practices, and their views on curating end up forming a basis for a heterogeneous field. This inclusion easily excludes curators working in the fringes, who do not belong to the selected networks, and who might regardless do important work in the field of curating.

Exhibitionary practices

Why exhibit?

As already mentioned, in this thesis I discuss curatorial work mainly with exhibitions by independent curators, outside museum institutions. In my own practice, I have been quite fond of the exhibition as a tool, as a setting, and as a special/specific space, where works of art can exist together and in relation to specific surroundings and visitors. However, it feels important to pose the question: why exhibit? What are the benefits of an exhibition? Who does an exhibition do good to?

A common, yet rather simplified, reply to the question regarding the reasons for exhibiting and the importance of exhibitions stems from the seminal publication *Thinking about exhibitions* (1996), in which art historians Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W.

Ferguson and Sandy Nairne begin by arguing that the exhibition has become *the* medium of how most art gets known (1996, 2). Ten to twenty years later, this statement has still been repeated and confirmed by various authors in publications concerning contemporary art, exhibitions, and curating (e.g. Marincola 2006, 9; O'Neill 2007, 14). Further, in the introduction to *Harald Szeemann: Individual methodology*, Florence Derieux begins by stating: "It is now widely accepted that the art history of the second half of the 20th century is no longer a history of artworks, but a history of exhibitions" (2007, 8).³⁴ While Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne are in their introduction to the publication mainly talking about exhibitions in museum settings (understanding the museum as a site for learning, leisure and enlightenment), in these later references the exhibition is not discussed in a museum context only, but also in relation to galleries, biennials, non-profit organisations, and basically any event or form of putting art on display.

It is not, then, only within the museum context where the exhibition gains its usefulness as a site for new art. Educational reasoning for exhibiting – making new art known to small and larger audiences, widening understanding about art, bringing forth artists from the margins and thus rewriting the art historical canon – appear as the main reasons for working with exhibitions alongside the epistemological question of what art is (that what is exhibited in art exhibitions). In this light, exhibiting art is understood as the process of making art visible to a public. In another formation, art theorist Lucy Steeds sees the exhibition as the occasion where art's meaning becomes collectively debated (2014, 13). Here the exhibition gains social and political significance on top of the epistemological and educational, as the exhibition becomes an arena where we get to discuss topics such as who makes the art that is exhibited, who gets to see it, and also, who gets to discuss it. The exhibition is then seen as a space and as *an event* where artworks, artists, institutions and viewers cross their paths; the exhibition is a space where art is encountered and experienced, and where knowledge about art and its significance and value is presented, mediated and discussed.

³⁴ This has been challenged by Myers 2011, 24-27.

We are living in a time where an increasingly large amount of information is available online³⁵, also on art. Information and knowledge about art is thus available, and easily accessible for example through artists' websites, art platforms, art magazine's platforms, online art journals, and Instagram accounts. It seems reasonable to think of other reasons than the aforementioned educational ones, to why exhibitions still have much significance in our society. Also, working with art at this very socio-political time adds yet another layer to the question 'why exhibit?'. While working on this research, between 2013 and 2018, an explicit and public misogynistic and racist wave has swept across the western world,³⁶ not leaving the cultural sphere or the art world aside.³⁷ During the research process amidst reports on the state of the climate, reoccurring terrorist attacks in European capitals, extending austerity and the success of right-wing politics, I have several times had to stop and convince myself why talking about art, working with art, and exhibiting art matters today. So, why exhibit? Rather than it arising from an individual need or passion for working towards creating spaces and situations for showing art, there needs to be something else that gives exhibitionary practices significance; it definitely needs to be something more than a personal drive to create a successful career as a curator, even though this is warmly encouraged by the capitalist system the art world and all of us in it, are crucially a part of.

³⁵ In December 1995, the estimated number of internet users was 16 million, the number in 2017 being 3835 million. www.internetworldstats.com, accessed 4/9/2017.

³⁶ Brexit in the UK in 2016; Donald Trump in the US in 2017; racism and xenophobia all over western world resulting in closing state borders, increasing support of right wing politics, and inevitable cuts in funding for art and culture.

³⁷ Just as an example, while writing this in February 2017, there was an ongoing heated public discussion concerning an East London gallery LD50 in Dalston, and their involvement in supporting fascist "alt-right" groups and politics through their programming at the gallery and in the public statements by the gallerists. After demonstrations, the gallery was closed in mid-March 2017. (<https://shutdownld50.tumblr.com/post/157441553836/racists-and-fascists-out-of-dalston-shut-down>; <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/feb/22/art-gallery-criticised-over-neo-nazi-artwork-and-hosting-racist-speakers>; <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/ld50-gallery-protest-lucia-diego-donald-trump-alt-right-hackney-dalston-a7596346.html>; <https://shutdownld50.tumblr.com/post/158389611151/grassroots-campaign-shuts-down-far-right-art>. All links accessed 14/03/17.)

Curator and writer Elena Filipovic replies to these points in her essay regarding exhibitions and their significance, and suggests we might turn the common assumption of knowledge production the other way around:

But what if we thought of the exhibition as the site where deeply entrenched ideas and forms can come undone, where the ground on which we stand is rendered unstable? Instead of the “production of knowledge” so frequently cited in institutional statements of purpose, an exhibition might provoke feelings of irreverence or doubt, or an experience that is at once emotional, sensual, political, and intellectual while being decidedly not predetermined, scripted, or directed by the curator or the institution (Filipovic 2013, 78).

Filipovic’s view on exhibitions summarises to a great extent how I perceive the significance and potential of exhibitions both as a curator and as a visitor to exhibitions. Not only does this help us to think about the substance of exhibitions outside educational and epistemological frames, but it also helps us to direct our focus away from the role of the curator and the institution, and on the art which is exhibited, as well on the curatorial processes the works of art participate in.

Filipovic’s statement entails also a notion of the social and political potential of an exhibition; embedded here is an idea of an exhibition’s ability to touch, to have an effect on, and even to transform a visitor who experiences it. This potential that art has, and thus, that exhibitions presenting works of art have too, is something I am discussing throughout this thesis.

I argue, then, that the potential and significance of art and exhibiting art lies in understanding an exhibition as a site for feeling, thinking, experiencing, questioning, and possibly, transforming. This does not exclude the previously mentioned prevailing notions of epistemological (exhibition as a site for knowledge production and negotiating what art is) or educational (exhibition as a site for presenting new art) as other aspects of the relevance of exhibitions. However, in this research the focus is not on these aspects. In a sense, this whole thesis is about my personal reply to the question ‘why exhibit?’. From chapter four onward, I’m searching for this answer in the area of affective embodied encounter, which most often is different to

an encounter online.³⁸ For me, the answer to ‘why exhibit’ has to do with what art can do to us, providing we let it. As a curator, I do believe that there is some exceptional value in encountering art in an exhibition context. It is an embodied, physical encounter taking place in time and space. It can be very unique, even a luxury, an experience you wouldn’t receive without turning up at a certain place at a certain time. This research is written through the idea that there is indeed significance and value for art, artist, curator, visitor, and a space, in the processes of exhibiting art.

Exhibition histories

The concept of the exhibition plays an essential part in understanding how we have got where we are within curatorial discourses today. According to Filipovic, the arrival of exhibition as a topic of critical studies in art history has been slow and reluctant (2013, 73). This seemingly simple act – putting art on display, creating a space for art – emerged in a scholarly field of study in late 1990s, in the realms of art history, museum studies, and finally, curatorial studies. Looking at titles published in this period of time, it is evident that *curating* has overrun *exhibition* as a topic by the early 2000s, at least regarding research on contemporary art exhibitions.

Mary Anne Staniszewski’s *The power of display. A history of exhibition installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (1998) has been one of the first publications to dedicate its topic to analysing structures of exhibition display and the processes of installing exhibitions in museum institutions. In the introduction of the book, Staniszewski argues that even though art historians have paid attention to analysis of individual works of art in exhibitions, the overall significance of exhibition contexts is lacking in the writings:

³⁸ I deliberately use the word ‘different’, as I am not convinced it is necessarily better or worse. Some art may be best encountered in a private sphere of the home mediated through one’s laptop, or perhaps as being part of an audience through an online screening in an auditorium. Some art may again be best encountered in a black or white cube in a museum.

Art historians have analyzed the works included in an exhibition and a show's effect as it is received within aesthetic, social, and political discourses. But they have rarely addressed the fact that a work of art, when publicly displayed, almost never stands alone: it is always an element within a permanent or temporary exhibition created in accordance with historically determined and self-consciously staged installation conventions. Seeing the importance of exhibition design provides an approach to art history that acknowledges the vitality, historicity, and the time-and-site-bound character of all aspects of culture (Staniszewski 1998, xxi).

Here Staniszewski calls for much needed focus on the surroundings of a work of art, and its relation to others around it. It is the topic of works of art existing in relation to each other and in relation to a spatial and ideological setting, as well as the research and thinking that has been done in order to place them so, taking into consideration the various parameters regarding permanent and temporary settings, that was lacking and much needed in art historical writing of the time.

Another early work on the topic is the aforementioned, and still often quoted anthology *Thinking about exhibitions* (1996). In the introductory chapter, Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne explain the need for critical discussion on the medium of art exhibition and curatorial practices, which until then had been in the margins of art historical discussions. As a reaction to changes in the art world of the time (growing number of exhibitions, lack of critical writing on the topic), the editors explicitly set out the discussion to writing about exhibitions, rather than the art shown in the exhibitions (1996, 3). Indeed, what both Staniszewski and the editors of *Thinking about exhibitions* are aiming for, is the point where the focus of art historical study may shift from the work of art to its relations with the surrounding space, and the manner in which the work of art is presented.³⁹

The topics of the essays in *Thinking about exhibitions* vary between exhibition histories, curatorship, exhibition sites and forms of installation, narratology, and spectatorship, taking into consideration historical, social, political and ideological aspects of exhibition making. What is interesting, is that the editors express a

³⁹ Interestingly enough, it appears discussing curatorial practices without discussing the art shown has now become *the* model of writing about contemporary curating. I am elaborating on this further in relation to contemporary curating later in this chapter.

deliberate wish to take distance to a museological context (1996, 2), in order to be able to talk about exhibition making at various sites and locations, as well as in various conditions in addition to gallery surroundings. A museological context entails a need for institutional critique, which makes it difficult to discuss the exhibitionary processes outside the museum walls.⁴⁰ Museums as sites for art are nevertheless discussed in the anthology as well, for example in the essays by Debora J. Meyers, Mieke Bal, Tony Bennett, Brian O'Doherty and Rosalind E. Krauss.

Brian O'Doherty's essays on economic, social and aesthetic aspects of work with art in commercial and museum galleries, published in 1976 in *Artforum*, were republished as a book *Inside the white cube: The ideology of the gallery space* in 1999, likely along the newly gained interest in the structures and ideologies of exhibition spaces. O'Doherty's publication remains essential reading when it comes to unveiling and understanding power structures and ideological discourses related to making art and exhibiting it on the walls of museums and commercial galleries.⁴¹ O'Doherty analyses the ways modern art museums function as ideological machines creating value and meaning to the art exhibited inside it, and unravels the assumed neutrality of a white cube environment. Museum displays cannot be seen as merely presenting a persistent style of exhibiting art, but also the meanings of the display need to be taken into consideration.

A slightly more recent anthology is *What makes a great exhibition?* (2006) edited by Paula Marincola. This publication doesn't in the end specifically focus on exhibitions, despite its title, but rather, on mapping out a variety of curatorial approaches. Being one of the first collections of essays focused on curatorial practices, the book aspires to present both practical issues in curating and theoretical contexts for discussing work of a curator, presenting some influential

⁴⁰ The recent history of curating has indeed little to do with the museum institution. Museums remain today, of course, spaces for art, but discussing curating in museums always sets a necessary frame to the discussion regarding the ideologies, tasks and responsibilities of museum institutions, which would be too vast in the frame of this research, as well as too far from my selected research questions.

⁴¹ O'Doherty's book was essential reading for example in my curatorial MA course at Stockholm University in 2009.

curators along with their key exhibitions and recent projects. In another article anthology, *Exhibition experiments* (2007), edited by Sharon Macdonald and Paul Basu, the focus is on exhibitions in various museum contexts from the art museum to ethnographic and science museum settings. The publication focuses on the idea of the experiment, through case studies of inventive exhibitions as well as thinking patterns. The publication is an outcome of a conference on the topic, and perhaps because of this, it is primarily a wide selection of different views on experimental exhibition forms, media and technologies of display, including reflection on the motivations, effects, potential and limitations of exhibitionary experimentation (2007, 3).

Exhibition histories are also discussed in an on-going project by Afterall Books. The project was initiated through a research project at Central Saint Martins in London, and it is currently continued with the Center for Curatorial Studies, Bard College in New York. The series was inaugurated with the launch of *Exhibiting the New Art: 'Op Losse Schroeven' and 'When Attitudes Become Form' 1969* in 2010, and at the moment it includes nine publications.⁴² Each book focuses on specific exhibitions or an exhibition, unravelling them from various perspectives from documentation materials to reflective art historical essays. The series is also accompanied by a talk series, *Exhibition Histories Talks*, arranged in collaboration with Whitechapel Gallery since 2013 in relation to each title in the series.⁴³ Here, feminist issues are brought into discussion as part of *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74* (2012), edited by Cornelia Butler, and presenting essays, curatorial statements, documentation images, and interviews with artists who participated in Lippard's projects.

⁴² *Making Art Global (Part 1): The Third Havana Biennial 1989* (2011); *From Conceptualism to Feminism: Lucy Lippard's Numbers Shows 1969–74* (2012), *Making Art Global (Part 2): 'Magiciens de la Terre' 1989* (2013); *Exhibition as Social Intervention: 'Culture in Action' 1993* (2014); *Cultural Anthropophagy: The 24th Bienal de São Paulo 1998* (2015); *Exhibition, Design, Participation: 'an Exhibit' 1957 and Related Projects* (2016); *Anti-Shows: APTART 1982–84* (2017); and *Artist-to-Artist: Independent Art Festivals in Chiang Mai 1992–98* (2018).

⁴³ A full list of research events and talks can be found here: <https://www.afterall.org/books/exhibition.histories/exhibition-histories> (Accessed 18/08/2018).

In 2008 Tate Modern in London hosted a conference titled *Landmark Exhibitions: Contemporary Art Shows since 1968*, from which the papers were afterward compiled in an online publication, Autumn 2009 issue of *Tate Papers*, edited by Marko Daniel and Antony Hudek⁴⁴. In the introductory essay, Daniel and Hudek state, that the exhibition still remains an under researched topic within art historical and critical studies. The conference aimed to review the phenomenological, sociological, affective, economic and political contexts that condition art's presentation: "The art object has for too long been considered in isolation, as a material artefact independent of the web of power relations in which it is produced, discussed, exchanged, stored and exhibited. Now, perhaps as a reflection of a larger environmental awareness, the art object can be seen as one element in a dynamic, time- and site-sensitive microcosm" (Daniel & Hudek 2009). Drawing on feminist and Marxist art histories, here the editors and conference arrangers aimed to open up the discussion on exhibitions and the significance of exhibitions beyond art historians' views toward practitioners in museums and galleries, and educated visitors to exhibitions. This is the only mainstream event on exhibitions I found, that explicitly refers to feminist politics as an influence.

In addition to critical studies on exhibitions, there are also more art historical studies on exhibition histories, which can be seen as part of an endeavour of writing a canon of exhibitions. The exhibitions discussed in these publications are always group exhibitions, which has become "the main vehicle for creative expression authored by curators" (Hoffmann 2014, 14). Bruce Altshuler maps out the history of exhibitions from the 17th century until the early 2000s in his two large-scale publications *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions that made history 1863-1959* (2008) and *Biennials and beyond: Exhibitions that made history 1962-2002* (2013). A similar approach of listing historically important exhibitions, meaning influential and game-changing exhibitions that are referred to by important curators⁴⁵, is presented in Jens Hoffmann's *Show time: The 50 most influential exhibitions of contemporary art* (2014/2017).

⁴⁴ <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12> (Accessed 18/08/2018).

⁴⁵ This is a classic circular model where the same description of the word 'important' describes the important curator.

In the publication, Hoffmann sets out to introduce fifty historically significant exhibitions of contemporary art since the 1980s till today. Hoffmann calls his selection key exhibitions, which he sees as shows that have “truly changed the course of the discipline and contributed to a more complex understanding of what exhibition making means” (2014, 11). Indeed, as is the case in art historical canon building in general, there is a clear aim of mapping out a story of development towards something greater, through exhibition examples that can be described as innovative, ground-breaking and influential. Two feminist thematic exhibitions are included in Hoffmann’s listing: *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine* (1994-1996) curated by Catherine de Zegher, and *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) curated by Cornelia Butler. Hoffmann provides a short description of the exhibitions, but as a whole, the book is a listing with basic information about the projects, such as dates and places of the exhibition, names of the artists, and names of the curators. In addition to the *Landmark Exhibitions* event at Tate Modern, where feminist art history is mentioned as an influence, and Afterall publication on Lucy Lippard’s work, these are the only references to feminism I found in mainstream exhibition histories. Coming more straightforwardly from a feminist field, Maura Reilly’s recent publication *Curatorial Activism: Towards Ethics of Curating* (2018) turns out to be partly a feminist exhibition history, presenting key exhibitions with Reilly’s analysis of the projects.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ The exhibitions include: *Women Artists: 1550-1950*, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1976, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1977, curated by Linda Nochlin and Ann Sutherland Harris; *Bad Girls*, Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1993, The Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, 1994, New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1994, Wight Art Gallery, University of California, Los Angeles, 1994, curated by Kate Bush, Emma Dexter, Marcia Tucker, Marcia Tanner; *Inside the Visible*, 1994-1997, curated by Catherine de Zegher; *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago’s “Dinner Party” in Feminist Art History*, Museum of Art and Cultural Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1996, curated by Amelia Jones and Armand Hammer; *The Venice Biennale*, The Italian Pavilion and the Arsenale, Venice, Italy, 2005, curated by María de Corral and Rosa Martínez; *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art*, Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2007, The Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, USA, 2007, curated by Linda Nochlin and Maura Reilly; *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution*, MoMA, Los Angeles, 2007, National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC, 2007, MoMA PS.1, New York, 2008, Vancouver Art Gallery, Canada, 2008-2009, curated by Cornelia Butler; *elles@centrepompidou*, Paris, 2009-2011, curated by Camille Morineau; *Re.Act.Feminism #2 – A Performing Archive*, Centro Cultural Montehermoso, Spain, 2011, Wyspa Institute for Art, Gdansk, Poland, 2012,

Regarding critical contemporary writing on exhibitions specifically, which is useful for discussing feminist contexts, Elena Filipovic and Lucy Steeds are writers who have in their recent work focused on the topic from an analytical and critical point of view, explicitly taking distance from a curatorial positioning (Filipovic 2005, 2013, 2014-2015; Steeds 2014, 2016). Both of them seek to shift the focus in curatorial and exhibition studies “back to” the art that is exhibited, and how the analysis of exhibitions should play out on the dynamics between exhibitions as sites and the artworks in them – rather than focus on the curator or the curatorial concept the works are put into.

Filipovic insists that instead of thinking about what an exhibition might be, we should focus on what an exhibition can *do*. The site where the exhibition’s activity, its *doing*, happens, is the interplay of the exhibited works of art and the relationships that are created between them, the spatial setting they are in, and the discourse that frames them (2013, 75). One might for example simply think about how rearranging artworks in an exhibition creates a different kind of setting and atmosphere. In order to focus on this *doing* – which I very much aim to do in this research – we cannot dismiss the works of art. Filipovic’s emphasis on the *active*, and I would say, *affective*, aspect of the exhibition enables us to tune down the character of the curator. In a more recent project, Filipovic edited a serial publication on curatorial work by artists in collaboration with *Mousse* magazine (2014-2015). The collection of essays was published as a book with the title *The artist as curator: An anthology* in 2017; the series of essays unravels the history of artist-curated exhibitions since avant-garde till today, focusing on both the curatorial thinking and the art exhibited. The aim of the project has been to shed more light on how artists have contributed to what exhibitions today are and how they can be imagined, not only in terms of their content but also in terms of their structures and production processes. In Filipovic’s view, it is most often exhibitions curated by artists that succeed in creating new,

Galerija Miroslav Kraljevic, Zagreb, Croatia, 2012, Museum of Contemporary Art, Roskilde, Denmark, 2012, Tallinn Art Hall, Estonia, 2012, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 2012, Academy of Arts, Berlin, 2013, curated by Beatrice Stammer and Bettina Knaup.

interesting and engaging sites for artworks, and simultaneously stretch the concept of the exhibition itself (2013, 73-74).

Steeds has been part of Afterall Publishing's aforementioned *Exhibition Histories* project since 2010, and she also edited the title *Exhibition* (2014) in Whitechapel Gallery's *Documents of contemporary art* publication series. As mentioned above, for Steeds, talking about exhibitions rather than curating is a means for keeping the focus on the art that is exhibited. In her view, it is a question of finding a balance between presentation of curatorial aspirations, and using curatorial means in order to keep the focus on the art that is exhibited:

A focus on art's exhibition at the expense of the curatorial does not leave us contemplating the mechanics of exhibition-making but, rather, the crucial question of how art realizes its affective and discursive potential – how art takes shape in experience and what debates it kindles (2014, 14).

I argue, that these models of prioritising art on the expense of the curatorial concept, should be applied more effectively into a feminist curatorial context, both as part of feminist curatorial practice, and writing and theorisation around it. This brief mapping of exhibition studies provides a curious insight into the problematic dynamic between art historical and curatorial field of studies, as well as the personal position of the researcher: the exhibition was brought into an art historical context by a small number of art historians interested in exhibitionary practices somewhat 30 years ago, and it took decades of work to establish it as part of the field. In the contemporary curatorial context, on the other hand, there seems to exist a need to justify why exhibitions still are relevant topics of discussion and relevant sites for putting art on display. While the trouble in the beginning was that the focus was on art only and not the dynamics a work of art has with its surroundings, the focus shifted so thoroughly on curatorial practices in the process, that now there appears to be, on the contrary, a strong need to bring the art back to the discourse (Steeds 2014, 13-14; Filipovic 2013; 2014).

This speaks volumes about how quick the expansion of the curatorial field has actually been. Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam dedicated the spring 2015 issue of

their summer school programme and Online Journal *Stedelijke Studies* to critical views on exhibition histories, focusing exactly on the tensions between curatorial and art historical approaches in writing histories of exhibitions, recognising this as a field of ongoing debate and development.⁴⁷ The project took Afterall Publishing's exhibition histories as its starting point, recognising the shift from the individual artist's practice to the context of presentation (Boersma & van Rossem 2015). Critical and analytical writing on exhibition histories has also been published as part of the curatorial journal *The Exhibitionist* since its launch in 2010. In his essay, "Inhabiting Exhibition History", Julian Myers suggests we should stop seeing these through a rough dichotomy and instead, see the linkages in the practices and approaches (2011, 27). As I will present in chapter three, this discussion is highly relevant to the current discourses within feminist curating.

Coming back to *The power of display* and *Thinking about exhibitions*, what is very valuable to contemporary curatorial discourses in the legacy of exhibition studies in publications such as these, is how these publications brought the concept of the exhibition, reflection on the context of the work of art, and the process of exhibition making, into a scholarly discourse and opened it up for practitioners in the field. Acknowledging that there is aesthetic, historical, cultural, social and political value in the practice of exhibition making, has enabled a critical discussion on the topic, and worked in its part to enable the professionalization of curatorial practice. What can be concluded then, is that an exhibition is by no means the only "product" of curatorial work, but at the same time, it remains a relevant one. As several writers emphasize, an exhibition is not a neutral or *innocent* site (e.g. O'Doherty 1976/1999; O'Neill 2007, 2012; Filipovic 2013), but always alive through different kinds of ideological, personal, and thematic discourses.

⁴⁷ *Rewriting or Reaffirming the Canon? Critical Readings of Exhibition History*, <https://www.stedelijkstudies.com/issue-2-exhibition-histories/> (Accessed 18/08/18).

The educational turn

Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson begin the anthology *Curating and the educational turn* (2010) by stating: "Contemporary curating is marked by a turn to education. Educational formats, methods, programmes, models, terms, processes and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes of both curating and the production of contemporary art and in their attendant critical frameworks" (2010, 12). What O'Neill and Wilson mean, is that curating operates as an educational praxis, and not only that education would figure in the field as a theme. In this subchapter, I am briefly introducing the main ideas relating to this educational turn in curating, which took place in the early 2000s, relating both to educational infiltrations within contemporary art and curating of the time, and the proliferation of social and participatory projects entailing a variety of educational aspects.

Here, I briefly present also the emergence of curatorial postgraduate programmes, which to a large extent occurred parallel to the turn to education in Europe and North America. This can be seen as an essential aspect in the process of professionalization of curating, and the field entering a scholarly realm in general. What the excess of curatorial programmes has contributed to as well, is the sudden rise in the number of curators since the early 2010s, as the programmes are now producing new curators on a yearly basis. This has inevitably led to an expansion of independent curators, but perhaps also in specialisation within the profession.

Producing curators

The first programme in curatorial studies started in 1987 at the *École du Magasin* in Grenoble. The same year the Whitney Museum of American Art's Independent Study Program in New York renamed its Art History/Museum Studies course as Curatorial and Critical Studies. In the 1990s a number of new curatorial programmes were launched: *Curating Contemporary Art* at Royal College of Art, London (1992), *De Appel Curatorial Programme*, Amsterdam (1994), *Center for Curatorial Studies* at Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York (1994), and

Master Programme in Curating, Goldsmiths University of London (1995). In the 2000s, the number of courses, study programmes, and postgraduate studies in curating have steadily increased (Markopoulos 2016, 11). Curatorial study programmes are now organised by universities, auction houses, and museums.⁴⁸ When curators had previously trained through occupations at museums, galleries, art magazines, and academia as art historians, it has now become possible to attend a study programme in order to become a curator.⁴⁹

In her master thesis curator Camilla Larsson (2012) investigates fifteen curatorial study programmes in Europe and North America. According to her analysis, all of the programmes rely more or less on similar literature lists, and also have the same curatorial practices, theorists and exhibitions as their reference points. In an essay based on her research, Larsson expresses her worries on the consequences of this homogeneity, with regards to what it means to have future generations of curators with similar backgrounds, references and approaches to working with art. Further, even though the students are not required to have studied art history, they *are* expected to have a certain level of acquaintance with the art world. Larsson points out, that for example several programmes require letters of recommendation from actors in the art world as part of the application process, insinuating that the student must actually already be part of a certain network when applying and aspiring to become part of the art world (2013, 34-35).

The boom in curatorial education programmes has been followed by critical thinking on its consequences. An issue of *Manifesta Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* (no.4/2004) is dedicated to the topic of curatorial study programmes, with the title 'Teaching curatorship'. In the introduction to the issue, the emergence of curatorial postgraduate programmes is defined as an essential aspect of the professionalization

⁴⁸ There are also independent stances such as Node Center for Curatorial Studies in Berlin, which offers paid online courses since 2009.

⁴⁹ Personally, I never identified as a curator until I attended an MA program in curating art, even though my background consisted of previous postgraduate studied in art history, aesthetics and museum studies, as well as a work history in museums, galleries and art institutions.

of the curatorial field, and simultaneously as a realm in need of critical discussion.⁵⁰ The publication *Great Expectations: Prospects for the future of Curatorial Education* (2016), edited by Leigh Markopoulos, is an outcome of a symposium on the same topic, titled *The Next 25 Years: Propositions for the Future of Curatorial Education*, organised in March 2015 by the Graduate Program in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts in San Francisco. As the title suggests, the aim of the conference was to think together about the future of curatorial education, and what these futures might mean and offer to students participating in the programmes. Also, Dorothee Richter reflects on the topic from the point of view of an educational institution (postgraduate and MPhil/PhD programmes at Zurich University of the Arts) in her essay “Thinking about curatorial education” (2015). Richter opens up the educational approach of the programmes, emphasizing the importance of praxis supported by theory. From the educational institution’s side the questions that remain are how to teach curating in academia, keeping in mind it’s a practical profession, and how the curatorial studies programmes impact curating as a field of practice, taking into consideration that the point of departure in the study programmes is most often on curating, and not on an art historical approach to building knowledge about contemporary art and its various links to histories of art (Markopoulos 2016, 14).

The emergence of curatorial postgraduate programmes has offered platforms for critical thinking and talking about curating, assisted in developing the field of curating increasingly to a cross-disciplined field, and contributed to the process of professionalization. On the other hand, the programmes have also created problems of practical nature in the job market, while the large number of emerging curators adjust in various roles, trying to find their places in the art world (Ravini 2013, 47; Lind 2010, 66).⁵¹

⁵⁰ Introduction to the issue online: <http://www.manifestajournal.org/teaching-curatorship> (Accessed 19/08/18).

⁵¹ Indeed, in the context of describing the notion of the curatorial, Lind actually writes: “If ‘the curatorial’ – in a less qualitative and a more deadpan use of the term – can be present in the work of practically anybody active within the field of contemporary art, it could also be used as an escape route for someone who, like myself, is responsible for graduating fifteen curatorial students per year. Where will they find work? Given the proliferation of

Curating as an educational practice

As part of the educational turn, curating has been contextualised as an educational endeavour in itself. This is the starting point of the anthology *Curating and the Educational Turn* (2010) edited by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson. Having begun through the adaptation of pedagogical models in curatorial practices and critical art projects, the publication aims to critically analyse the emergence and use of educational aspects in the field. O'Neill and Wilson make a clear distinction in terms of museum education and similar cultural pedagogical projects. Rather, they emphasize projects and practices in which educational processes become part of the curatorial or artistic project itself (2010, 12-13).⁵²

The impact of the educational turn can be seen also in the operations of institutions. O'Neill and Wilson mention for example Maria Lind's work at Kunstverein München, Catherine David's work at Witte de With in Rotterdam and Maria Hlavajova's at BAK in Utrecht (2010, 13). According to O'Neill and Wilson, these experimental, though often short-lived institutional models, can be described by a counter-institutional ethos, focus on durational dialogical process, and an aspiration to open up the hierarchical models of both the institution and its operational practices (2010, 13-14). What is noteworthy is that the educational aspect is not that of 'schooling', meaning that the institution would educate its visitors. Instead the idea is to open up a space for exchange of different knowledges, and see the art space more as a space for critical discussion and negotiation of cultural values. One could also mention Maria Lind's more recent work at Tensta Konsthall in Stockholm⁵³, Emily Pethick's work at Showroom in London, and Binna Choi's at

curatorial programs across the globe, some creative thinking has to be done to determine which jobs they should look for. The existing curatorial positions simply won't suffice" (2010, 66). I discuss this further at the very end of this chapter.

⁵² It is probably not a coincidence, that when the first postgraduate programme in curating in Finland got started in 2010 at Aalto University in Helsinki, the programme was titled CuMMA – Curating, Managing and Mediating Art. The professor of the course during the inaugural years was Nora Sternfeld, whose practice is focused on both education and curating.

⁵³ Lind opens up her work at Tensta Konsthall for example in her article "Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden" (2015).

Casco in Utrecht. During my curatorial course in 2009, I did an internship at Botkyrka konsthall, located in a suburb of Stockholm. The director of the kunsthalle at the time was curator Joanna Sandell, who had initiated a similar structure for the space. The exhibition programming was adapted to an architectural setting enabling discussion and creating a special space reserved for dialogue. Each member of the staff held their office in the exhibition space certain days of the week, opening up the traditionally enclosed space of the office and dissolving hierarchies between the staff. The exhibition space was also opened up towards the municipal library in the neighbouring space, allowing library visitors to purposefully or accidentally wander into the exhibition space. As we see here, what is at stake is a discursive and non-hierarchical space both for art, and a multitude of stopovers; it doesn't in the end concern education in any traditional sense.

When talking about major historical changes in curatorial practices within the past two decades, curator Mary Ann Jacob names the shift to understanding the audience as a protagonist of an exhibition (Hoffmann 2014, 246). This shift includes the theme of participation in much of the art of the early 2000s (as discussed in the introduction), but also a subtler negotiation, or engagement, between a work of art and a viewer. Indeed, I argue that the focus towards audiences and the acts of mediating, which have essentially remained in curatorial discourses, can be seen as effects of the educational turn. Mediation of art, and the idea of the curator as a 'middle-wo/man' has appeared as another aspect of the educational turn. A few curatorial publications around this time focused more on the aspect of mediation. In *Imagining Audiences: Viewing positions in curatorial and artistic practice* (2012), edited by Magdalena Malm and Annika Wik, the topic of mediating is approached through focus on the role of audiences as the object of curatorial and artistic practices. The editors were at the time running a non-profit art organisation called Mobile Art Productions, which produced site-specific projects with contemporary artists in different locations in Sweden outside gallery spaces. In the book the audience is then understood and discussed mostly outside traditional spaces for art.

In *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating* (2013), edited by Jens Hoffmann, Maria Lind focuses on the question: Why mediate art? According to Lind, the question about mediating concerns topics of locating the audiences, as well as understanding how art functions as part of the society and culture today (2013, 85). Lind finds a model for educational practices with art in collectivist approaches to spectatorship, promoted for example by artist El Lissitzky and curator Alexander Dorner (2013, 87). The model “encouraged a varied and active experience through dynamic exhibition design, where things looked different from different angles, while simultaneously emphasizing the totality of the installation. It also promoted ideas of shared, collective encounters with art” (2013, 87). Similar approaches to audiences Lind finds in the work of Group Material, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno, and Liam Gillick. What is important, is that mediation is also about a dialogue between the curator and the works exhibited: the work itself has great significance to how it should be mediated. What mediation ideally is for Lind, is “creating contact surfaces between works of art, curated projects, and people, about various forms and intensities of communicating about and around art” (2013, 88).

In the introduction to the publication *It's all mediating: Outlining and incorporating the roles of curating and education in the exhibition context* (2013), one of the editors, museum educator Kaija Kaitavuori notes, that in the flow of the educational turn, their publication strives also to unravel hierarchies between curators and art educators: “Rather than signifying a new turn, this sort of discourse is only a new chapter in an old book. It is largely the outcome of a standing hierarchy. When we talk about the relationship between curating and education, we have to bear in mind the existing power balance, or rather, the unbalance between them. The difference in status between curatorial and educational functions has been noted by many writers and observers” (2013, xiii). The book brings up an important question regarding the valuation of education versus curatorial work. Promotion of the educational turn from the side of the curators can be partly seen as a provocation for the educators who have been working on the topics in question all along, only undervalued. Museum education has indeed been conceptualised as a field of its own, and in this sense, it is refreshing that Kaitavuori brings museum education, somewhat

provokingly, into the field of curating to address the relations and tensions between the fields (2013, xii-xvii).⁵⁴

What have remained essential topics in curatorial practice after the educational turn, are the topics of locating audiences and mediating art. As part of this, the relation the curator creates with an artist, or at least with a work of art, rises to the fore. As emphasized by Maria Lind above, mediating necessarily requires research and understanding of an artist's practice. As has by now become evident, mediating can be seen as one of the most essential tasks of the curator: art is always exhibited for someone. As I'm later on focusing specifically on the topic of affect, the idea of mediation is essential to my arguments in this study.

Contemporary curating

From curatorship to curatorial practices

The proliferation of biennials occurred at a moment at which curatorship opened out to become an expanded field that went beyond mere display and material production, to take account of the discursive and distributional modes of exchange while acting as a catalyst for challenging what we know and the ways in which it becomes known. Although the expansion of the biennial exhibition model is both a symptom and a condition of our globally networked age, its myriad forms have provided small moments of resistance, dissensus, antagonism, and counter spectacle in relation to the grand narratives of art history, consumer culture, mass entertainment, and the market-driven hegemonic forces of global capitalism (O'Neill 2012, 84).

In this quote, O'Neill summarises discourses initiated by the emergence of biennial culture, and which remain prevalent on the curatorial field still today: curatorship as an expanded field beyond material production; obtaining an active position to

⁵⁴ Educational and pedagogical aspects within the *museum institution* in relation to both temporary exhibitions, the display of permanent collections, and the operations within the museum as a whole have been largely discussed in the field of museum studies, which I have not included as part of this thesis because of the focus on contemporary curatorial discourses and independent curatorship. For educational and pedagogical aspects relating to *museum institutions*, see e.g. Hooper-Greenhill 2007; 1992.

knowledge production; self-criticism in terms of modes of practice and discourse; consciousness of the practice as part of a greater cultural field of art history, critical theory, consumer culture, mass entertainment and global capitalism.

As my analysis shows by now, curatorial thought is today a multitude of approaches and voices. Proposals to what curating can be have been made over the past thirty years, and are still made today.⁵⁵ O'Neill notes, that in the beginning of the 1990s, most anthologies on curating came out of international meetings, symposia and conferences.⁵⁶ This highlights again the need the field has had of oral histories, as well as the format of symposia and conferences in creating a critical base for a profession on the grow.

Along with literature on curatorial practices emerging, also journals focusing on curatorial practice appeared as platforms for critical discussion. *Manifesta Journal for Contemporary Curating* was initiated in 2003 as an independent project by the Manifesta Foundation. Online journal *ONCURATING.org* was initiated in 2008 by Dorothee Richter as a platform for discussing curatorial practice and theory. The first issue of *The Exhibitionist* came out in 2010 with Jens Hoffmann as its founding editor, providing a platform for critical discussion. *The Journal of Curatorial Studies*, initiated in 2012 has a more academic approach, being an international peer-reviewed journal.

⁵⁵ Only on the day of writing this in August 2018 I have discovered a recent publication on curating, *The Curatorial Complex: Social Dimensions of Knowledge Production* (2018) by Wiebke Gronemeyer, focusing on the social function of curating.

⁵⁶ These include *Meta 2: The New Spirit in Curating* (1992) by Ute Meta Bauer, *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future* (1996) edited by Peter White, *On Curating: The contemporary art museum and beyond* (1997) edited by Anna Harding, *Stopping the process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions* (1998) edited by Mika Hannula, *Curating Degree Zero, An International Curating Symposium* (1999) edited by Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter, *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice* (2000) edited by Catherine Thomas, *Curating in the 21st Century* (2000) edited by Dave Beech and Gavin Wade, *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation* (Series 1-5) (2000-2002) edited by Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin, *Foci: Interviews with 10 international curators* (2001) edited by Carolee Thea, *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice?* (2001) edited by Paula Marincola, *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum* (2001) edited by Carin Kuoni, *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices* (2003) edited by Melanie Townsend, *MIB – Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice* (2004) edited by Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler and Künstlerhaus Bethanien, and *Curating with Light Luggage* (2005) edited by Liam Gillick and Maria Lind (O'Neill 2007, 13).

As it is by now evident, Paul O'Neill has been extremely active in contributing to discussions and literature on contemporary curating (2007; 2010; 2012; 2016). His point of departure is in the need to direct critical focus away from first person narratives and on processes of curating and institutional power structures, rather than outcomes of curatorial practices, or the curators themselves (2007, 13).

However, even if O'Neill states this as his driving force, the first anthology he edited on curating, *Curating subjects* (2007), does take the curator as a character as its starting point. The difference here is, though, that the curators do not tell first-person-narratives, but critically think and write about other curator's projects and practices.

In *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (2012) O'Neill maps out the development of curatorship and contemporary curatorial discourse. A central point in his research is the globalization of the art world in the 1990s and the emergence of biennial culture. The biennial and the globalization of the art world appear actually as the two intertwined and simultaneous causes and effects in relation to what curatorial practice was, and what forms it has taken today. The history of contemporary curatorship and curating appear in O'Neill's writing strongly as a developmental narrative. He does acknowledge his own position as a practitioner in the field he is writing about, and the intent to be critical of it (2012, 4). At one point, he brings up Hans Ulrich Obrist's endeavour of inscribing a history of curating grounded in the present as an example, pointing out how Obrist as part of this process tends to write in his own practice as a logical continuation of the previous masters' work (2012, 41). While writing about the history of the field, and adding his own projects as part of it, it appears as if O'Neill is in fact doing the same. As a curator, artist, writer and educator, O'Neill is himself essentially intertwined in the international art world, having produced exhibitions in central art capitals, having participated in creating several curatorial discourses, and having been teaching curating (de Appel and Bard Center for Curatorial Studies). The discourses O'Neill builds in his research, also position him and his practice as part of its development – and, of course, in the most evolved end as a nomadic international curator, applying critical theory in their practice. As I am employing a similar structure of study as

O'Neill – creating a narrative around feminist curatorial practices and reflecting my own practice in it – I have been cautious of the topic. I am returning to it in the concluding chapter.

The list of publications grown out of conferences shows (see above), that there is a large number of volumes available on curating. The trouble with anthologies is, that these publications usually present a selection of fragments of individual points of view. This is why O'Neill's writing practice has been particularly valuable to the field, accompanied so far mainly by Terry Smith's two volumes *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) and *Talking Contemporary Curating* (2015). O'Neill's research into the field of curating is insightful, and its focus is on the art and realised projects, as well as on the development of curatorial thinking and discourses, and not as much on curators as persons. The research is conducted by using the existing first-person-narratives, and bringing forth the reoccurring thoughts and themes. This narrative, which is more analytical of the practices, wasn't written until his doctoral research and the publication of *The culture of curating and the curating of culture(s)*. However, what I find problematic, is that feminist critique is completely absent from this "universal" narrative of curatorial discourses in Europe and Northern America O'Neill writes about. For example, O'Neill discusses Lucy Lippard's practice in relation to conceptual art and her seminal 'numbers shows' (2012, 14-15), but does not take up her investment in feminist critique and work with women artists at the time in any way. When talking about the educational turn in curating and artistic practices, feminist participatory works and radical pedagogies would seem like an evident reference point. However, these do not appear as part of the main narrative in the turn to education. In his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) Terry Smith does acknowledge the blockbuster exhibitions on feminist and women art, arranged at major national museums and galleries post-2005 in Europe and North America (2012, 147-151). On the other hand, feminist thought does not appear elsewhere in his writing. All and all, women curators start emerging in the mainstream narratives of curating only along with the emergence of biennial culture in the late 1980s. Lucy Lippard is the only woman curator/critic who is mentioned along with her male peers in the pre-biennial boom period. After

this, some women curators are more often mentioned, mainly Ute Meta Bauer, Maria Lind, Catherine David, Mary Jane Jacob, and Carolyn Christov-Bagarkiev.⁵⁷

How to work with art

Since the late 1960s, contemporary curating has changed from being an activity primarily involved with organising exhibitions of discrete artworks to a practice with a considerably extended remit. Today's curating may be distinguished from its precedents by a new emphasis upon the activities associated with the framing and mediation, as well as with the circulation of ideas about art. So it is no longer primarily based on arts' production and display. That is why I support the use of the term "curating" as an expansive category that includes exhibition making, commissioning, editing, discursive production, cooperative working and modes of self-organisation." Paul O'Neill (in Amundsen & Mørland 2010, 7)

Quoting again O'Neill, it can be stated that contemporary curatorial practices lean towards discursive practices of mediation and communication, and contextualisation of art as part of curated projects. Curatorial work is expanded from producing an exhibition as an outcome, to include the whole process involved in working with contemporary art in its various forms. Discussions on contemporary curating relate then much more to the question of 'how to work with art as a curator' than 'how to define a curator'. What becomes necessarily part of the discussion are the social, historical, cultural and epistemological meanings of curatorial practices: how these practices are intertwined with practices of making art, but also politics, financial structures, and the larger cultural sphere.

In the contemporary curatorial discourses, curatorial work has extended the person of the curator in the sense that it reaches outside the individual curatorial practice: what arises are links to social and cultural matters and situatedness of the practice.

⁵⁷ As a topic for future research, an investigation into gender aspect in the process of the emergence of the independent curator might be interesting. My assumption is, that there have always been women working as curators in museum institutions. It would be interesting to see how the gender aspect would affect the narrative, in terms of how creative curatorial positions and the positions which require the care-work in art institutions (administration) have been divided after this turning point.

Curating is discussed, perhaps even *preferably*, as taking various organisational forms, relying on collaborative models and structures of working. As O'Neill puts it: "This frames the curatorial as a durational, transformative, and speculative activity, a way of keeping things in flow, mobile, in between, indeterminate, crossing over and between people, identities, and things, encouraging certain ideas to come to the fore in an emergent communicative process ..." (2012, 89). The communication and collaboration concern first the relationship between the artist and the curator: an exhibition becomes often a collaborative, or even a collective activity, where processes of artistic production are explored, discussed and mediated. Here an exhibition can be seen as a waypoint in a process rather than as a finished product (2012, 116). O'Neill mentions curators such as Ute Meta Bauer, Charles Esche, Nicolaus Schafhausen, Barbara Vanderlinden and Igor Zabel as curators who have contributed to this form of curating through their practices. O'Neill calls this a performative and dialogical model of curating, where the exhibition becomes a space of constant renegotiation between the participating bodies (2012, 116). These models of curating may be understood as reactions toward, or against, the singly authored model of curating presenting the curator as an auteur.⁵⁸ The shift further away from issues around the person of the curator, and toward critical investigation of the practice of curating, can be seen in the literature on the field. The focus in publications after the turn of the millennium has been more directly on questions relating to how to work with art.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ In Stockholm, I worked on a project with similar aims in 2011-2012. The project, titled *Provrummet* (fitting room in Swedish, but also a room for testing and experimenting), was carried out regularly in an artist-run space in a suburb of Stockholm. As part of it, I realised short exhibitions and events with artists, creating a safe space where to test ideas, plans, or collaborations. The events were open to public.

⁵⁹ These titles include *Issues in curating contemporary art and performance* (2007) edited by Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick, *Curating Critique* (2007) edited by Marianne Eigenheer, Dorothee Richter and Barnaby Drabble, *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (2007) edited by Steven Rand and Heather Kouris, *Rotterdam Dialogues: The Critics, The Curators, The Artists* (2010) edited by Zoë Gray, *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s)* (2012) by Paul O'Neill, *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) by Terry Smith, *Ten Fundamental Questions of Curating* (2013) edited by Jens Hoffmann, *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections* (2015) edited by Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Morland, *Talking Contemporary Curating* (2015) by Terry Smith, *Curating Research* (2015) edited by Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson, *The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice?* (2016) edited by Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson and Lucy Steeds, *The New Curator: Researcher, Commissioner, Keeper, Interpreter, Producer, Collaborator* (2016) edited by Natasha Hoare, and

Art historian Terry Smith approaches the question of curating through the concept of the contemporary (2012; 2015). Particularly in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) Smith is on a quest to find an overarching definition of *contemporary* curatorial practice: "... broadly speaking, contemporary curating aims to display some aspect of the individual and collective experience of what it is, or was, or might be, to *be* contemporary" (2012, 30; original emphasis). For Smith, the key element to discussing curating is how it relates to the setting of the practice as part of contemporary state of things. On his quest, Smith arrives also to definitions such as this one on the act of exhibiting:

To exhibit is ... to bring a selection of such existents (along, perhaps, with other relevant kinds), or newly created works of art, into a shared space (which may be a room, a site, a publication, a web portal, or an app) with the aim of demonstrating, primarily through the experiential accumulation of visual connections, a particular constellation of meaning that cannot be made known by any other means (2012, 30).

As the abstraction in this definition of the act of exhibiting shows, this might not be a useful way to think about contemporary curating; it is difficult to do anything with a definition such as this. It might be added, that some curators may work with immaterial works of art, such as sound based art or perhaps scents, where the visual connections Smith mentions wouldn't apply. Even the visual connections would have to be reformulated as sensory connections. In any case, perhaps partly because realising the emptiness this abstraction leads to, in the second volume *Talking Contemporary Curating* (2015) Smith engages in dialogue with curators working with various agendas, methods and platforms, focusing more on the material basis of the praxis.

Other publications, such as *The New Curator: Researcher, Commissioner, Keeper, Interpreter, Producer, Collaborator* (2016) edited by Natasha Hoare, emphasize the multitude of practices and positions included in contemporary curating. In a sense,

Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performativity as Curatorial Strategy (2017) edited by Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza.

this publication returns to first-person-narratives discussed above.⁶⁰ At the same time, the publication differs from these as well, as the aim is to open up, discuss, and contextualise the variety of practices (though the topics of research, commissioning, collection work, mediation, producing, and collaborating), which are not directly discussed in the previous anthologies. The publication presents the work of 15 women curators and 17 men curators. The topic of feminism is brought up as part of four presentations in the publication, and as a driving force only in the project *Weight* (2013) by artists Ragnar Kjartansson and Andjeas Ejiksson as part of the Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art. The artists' curatorial and performative project took place over two days in the biennial, taking Carolee Schneemann's practice as its inspirational and political starting point (Kjartansson & Ejiksson 2016, 182-184).

The Curatorial Conundrum: What to Study? What to Research? What to Practice? (2016) edited by Paul O'Neill, Mick Wilson and Lucy Steeds ties the areas of education, research and practice into one whole. The essays in each section brings up critical questions that the writers consider left aside in current discussions. Again, the articles bring up a variety of views, positions, approaches and methodologies, focusing though clearly on critical positions, as well as political topics regarding gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, and nationality, within a curatorial discourse. Curator Vivian Zihler's experimental essay "In Search of a Flashlight: The Intimate Politics of the Curatorial" takes feminist politics as a point of departure, while calling for an aesthetic solidarity among practitioners in the art world. According to Zihler, curatorial practice should activate an ethical sense in terms of solidarity and communication, as a reaction against the capitalist art world governed by competition and acceleration (2016, 224).

There remains an existing need to contextualise abstract writing on curating and its theories to actual practices and projects. The conundrum is, that here we seem to fall again into the path of first-person-narratives. Perhaps the key is a balance

⁶⁰ Yet, it must be noted, this is a distinct path from the co-existing single-authored celebrity curator narrative.

between thinking about concrete curatorial projects, and carefully contextualising them in the current socio-economic-cultural situations, other practices, as well as theory. As we see in Smith's attempts to define contemporary curatorial practice without a specific context, it becomes evident a curatorial practice cannot be meaningfully defined like this. Curatorial practice is not an independent set of procedures, methods, or a set philosophy, that could be adapted to any given situation or project as such. Instead, a curatorial practice along with its methods, theories and approaches, is always in a flux, changing according to the setting where it will be used. Most importantly, a curatorial practice adapts to the art that the curator works with. Contemporary curating cannot be defined as *a* pre-determined set of practices, as *an* approach, or as *a* discourse.

Curating / the curatorial

Performing the curatorial

Above I have written about how the discourses on curatorship and the practices of curating have developed since the late 1980s. In a nutshell, the focus has shifted from the caretaker of collections and administrator of exhibitions, to the independent curator and practices outside museum institutions and galleries. The discussions have shifted from the singly authored exhibition model, encouraged by the proliferation of biennial culture, towards more discursive models of curating, which propose alternative and collaborative models of curating, and where dialogue, research and process are emphasized.

As O'Neill argues, the critical focus has for too long been on the outcomes of curating, such as an exhibition, a catalogue, or an event (2007, 13). A number of curators and artists at the time, for example curators Irit Rogoff and Maria Lind, as well as artist Liam Gillick, felt the same (Lind 2010, 65). In her essay "Smuggling: An Embodied Criticality" (2008) curator and critical theorist Irit Rogoff writes about the curatorial as a way of unravelling current curatorial models of determined

or limited outcomes planned in advance. Working through the curatorial as a process where art unfolds in relation to its surrounds, its contexts, viewers and readers, is brought to the fore. Here the curatorial process, and perhaps particularly its process of unfolding, reminds that of a site-specific, process-oriented artistic practice.

Another curator who has found the focus on curatorial outcomes and the topic of curatorship particularly problematic is Maria Lind. In the aforementioned column, titled “The curatorial” (2009), Lind employed the term “the curatorial” in order to find and address something that defines a curator’s practice beyond the background the curator may have (artist, art historian, cultural producer), and beyond the area the curatorial process they may be active in (critique, editing, research, education, fundraising) (2010, 63). The leading idea in Lind’s text is to talk about curating in an expanded field, outside the processes of exhibition making. The curatorial is a way of thinking in terms of “interconnections: linking objects, images, processes, people, locations, histories, and discourses in physical space like an active catalyst, generating twists, turns, and tensions” (2010, 63). What is essential, is that all these actions are made in order to put the artwork in the centre of it all – to encourage one to think from it, around it, against it, and with it.

In this dense column on the curatorial, Lind describes the curatorial in relation to political theorist Chantal Mouffe’s (2005) notion of *the political*, where the term is defined as an ever-present potential inherent in societies, growing out of the bond and dynamic between the majority and the opposition, and which cannot quite be located. For Mouffe, *politics* is the formal part where the political is practiced: decisions are made and orders reproduced.⁶¹ Following this, Lind sees *curating* as the formal processes of making exhibitions and other curatorial projects happen, and *the curatorial* as “a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth, a presence that

⁶¹ Lind doesn’t mention this, but Mouffe’s notion bases on Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault’s discussion (1977) on the differences between politics and the political.

strives to create friction and push new ideas” (2010, 64).⁶² Taking its form in various ways in the interconnectedness and links between material and immaterial things, the curatorial, or perhaps, the *workings of the curatorial*, can be detected and discussed also through concrete projects. As an example Lind brings up São Paulo Biennial of 2008, curated by Ivo Mesquita and Ana Paula Cohen. Here Lind detects the curatorial in “the careful consideration of the biennial’s history, the current institutional situation in São Paulo and in Brazil, and in the combination of artists and types of artworks, as well as in the spatial organization” (2010, 65). The curatorial works against the status quo, in the dynamics of various layers and actors coming together. Instead of *representing* something from a set source or background, the curatorial *performs* something in the actual moment. Here, we are again at the heart of matter with the question: what can an exhibition or a curatorial practice *do*? Lind thus emphasizes the curatorial as something that unfolds in the *experience* of an exhibition, for example. In a sense, the curatorial appears as a process which we cannot completely plan in advance. There may be intentions, approaches and methods, but how the process will actually take place, how it will unfold, and what it will hence produce, remains unknown and can only be speculated on.

Lind was in charge of a research project titled “Performing the curatorial”, which started in 2009 within the Cultural Heritage platform at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden. The research group consisted of researchers from fields of curating, museum studies, history, archaeology, and visual arts. The aim was to study curating “within art in order to try to conceive of it as beyond art, pushing it towards the cross-disciplinary and the curatorial” (Lind 2012, 9). The research group realised three symposiums on the topic of the curatorial, leading to the publication *Performing the curatorial: Within and beyond art* (2012). Beyond mere exhibition making, the curatorial seeks to engage with art as an on-going process of ideas. The curatorial refers to sets of signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places and ideas, that work to develop thinking around what art can do (2012, 16-20).

⁶² For Lind’s view in relation to Mouffe’s *the political*, see also 2012, 19-20; 2013b.

In the introduction to a recent publication on curating, *Empty Stages, Crowded Flats: Performativity as Curatorial Strategy* (2017), the editors Florian Malzacher and Joanna Warsza define the performative curatorial model by following Judith Butler's theory of "the performative capacity to transform reality with words and other cultural utterances" (2017, 11). Performative curating is here understood then as a form of 'reality-making', and simultaneously nodding towards the curator's role in this process as the 'reality-maker'. As I understand it, the way Rogoff and Lind write about performing the curatorial is something different to this. Here the focus is more on how the curated event – whatever it may be – plays out in the moment of the different actors and elements in the project coming together. This is something I strongly recognise, and also embrace, in work with art. A curatorial concept may have aims and hopes of what it will achieve when realised, but the more air there is in these expectations, the more interesting the outcome usually is. The contingency I talk about has to do with our affective encounters with art, and the outcomes which we may plan and desire, but simultaneously cannot predict.

Taking the curatorial as a starting point for discussing curatorial work with art opens up possibilities of discussing meanings of curatorial practices in more elaborate ways than focusing strictly on the processes of curating projects. In this thesis, I argue that this concept in fact enables us to discuss feminism and curating outside any thematic exhibition setting, and enables us to discuss the transformative potential feminist curatorial work with art can entail. What comes to focus is collaboration with artists and spaces, consideration of what making art public in a specific context means for the artworks, and what kind of ideas and ideologies are put in use in the process of working.

Curatorial knowledge production

In recent publications, the curatorial has been taken as a point of departure in order to expand and critically analyse the prevalent curatorial paradigm towards curatorial actions and thinking, and to open up and develop critical discussion beyond the

processes of making art public.⁶³ The articles in these anthologies are by writers from the fields of contemporary art, philosophy, critical theory, cultural studies, anthropology, and education. The discussions presented emphasize the inclusion and significance of curatorial practices as part of larger social, historical and cultural structures.

Jean-Paul Martinon and Irit Rogoff have since 2006 directed the practice-led PhD programme Curatorial/Knowledge at Goldsmiths University of London. In the preface to *The Curatorial: Philosophy of Curating* Rogoff and Martinon summarise their thinking on curating and the curatorial. The aspects of curating they wish to grasp are: its potentials and scopes, the knowledges it builds on as well as the knowledges it produces, its sociabilities, collectivities and convivialities, its commitments to seeing, reading, speaking and exchanging as a form of public activity, and the possibilities it entails for other ways of working, relating and knowing (2013, viii-xi). The need to critically reflect and theorise the practice of curating refers here also to the proliferation of the curatorial field within a relatively short period of time. According to Rogoff and Martinon, “all this activity is not founded on a solid intellectual basis that might empower its practitioners to have the critical courage to resist demands to simply supply more and more excitement to a market ravenous for spectacle and entertainment” (2013, ix). The curatorial emerges thus partly as a critical reaction to the prevailing state of curatorial practices and its location as part of a capitalist art market driven scene. Interestingly enough, art or any form of making art public, are not mentioned as part of this list. Instead, the topics mentioned are aspects concerning social or cultural issues practices of curating are linked with. None of the essays in the book address work with art either, as the

⁶³ The curatorial has been discussed in the anthology *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (2013) edited by Jean-Paul Martinon, as well as in the series *Cultures of the Curatorial*, including titles *Cultures of the Curatorial* (2012) edited by Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski, *Timing: On the Temporal Dimension of Exhibiting* (2014) edited by Beatrice von Bismarck, Rike Frank, Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer, Jörn Schafaff and Thomas Weski, and *Hospitality: Hosting Relations in Exhibitions* (2016) edited by Beatrice von Bismarck and Benjamin Meyer-Krahmer. The former publication is affiliated with the Curatorial/Knowledge PhD programme at Goldsmiths College in London, and the latter with the Cultures of the Curatorial postgraduate study programme at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig.

essence of the curatorial is being discussed more as a philosophical and theoretical practice, or perhaps, an ethical stance.

The Cultures of the Curatorial postgraduate study programme at the Academy of Visual Arts in Leipzig was initiated by Beatrice von Bismarck in 2009. These two educational programmes have then been initiated approximately around the same time, and their approaches appear to be similar in terms of their focus on expanding the field of curating towards the concept of the curatorial, along with the theoretical and philosophical take on curating itself. In a conversation between Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck (2012) the writers discuss the epistemological aspect of curating and the curatorial. Rogoff in particular is interested in the curatorial as a site for knowledge production. She refers to the curatorial also when talking about a particular kind of knowledge, produced cross-disciplinarily in the intersections of various fields, and through spatial arrangements that allow different ways of participating in these events of knowledge (noted by Lind 2012, 18). Rogoff's interests are in understanding activities within the curatorial as an epistemic structure aiming for knowledge production: "The curatorial seems to be an ability to think everything that goes into the event of knowledge in relation to one another" (2012, 23). Rogoff emphasizes a relational aspect of knowledge production, presenting it as a field of coming together of approaches and previous sets of knowledges. Beatrice von Bismarck in her turn understands the curatorial as a constellational activity (2012, 24). Unlike Rogoff, who sees curating as a representational activity, separate from the curatorial, as an on-going process beyond materiality and representation, for von Bismarck activities in curating feed into the curatorial. For her, the curatorial is a dynamic field where a constellational condition comes into being, and is constituted by curatorial techniques as well as different participants and elements (2012, 24).

According to Rogoff, the practice of curating operates in the regime of the representational and aims towards an end product, in which art is in some form made public: an exhibition, a catalogue, or an event. Curating stands for the technical and practical activities, through which art is made public. The curatorial,

on the other hand, turns to a set of possibilities for larger agendas in the art world and beyond it, with focus on on-going social, cultural and political processes (2012, 22-23). Here the emphasis is on activity, and what is happening in the moment of experience and knowledge. This idea links also to Lind's thoughts on performing the curatorial, and the significance of the unfolding in the moment. In Rogoff's view, it is the potential embedded in the curatorial process that comes through in the event of knowledge. It appears almost as a necessity to focus on this in curatorial work and research: challenging existing ways of thinking and encouraging alternative ways of thinking, are presented as the main purposes of meaningful curatorial practice. Focusing on the curatorial is to develop a discourse that reaches outwards, instead on inwards such as in descriptions of curatorial projects and experiences.

I am in this thesis employing the concept of the curatorial mostly in the light Irit Rogoff described it in 2008, and where Maria Lind continued from in 2009. The curatorial is then a tool for exploring the relational aspects of curatorial practices in terms of art, artists, curators, spaces, as well as audiences. As much as I see potential in the concept, I have also had my doubts. One problematic aspect is that the curatorial as a concept has provably emerged in relation to, and also in connection with, curatorial postgraduate programmes. It is writers deeply affiliated with two different educational programmes, Curatorial/Knowledge and Cultures of the Curatorial, who have produced the main part of literature regarding the concept. Further, at the time of writing her column "The Curatorial" in 2009, Lind was leading the Bard Center for Curatorial Studies. To conclude her text, Lind states:

If 'the curatorial' – in a less qualitative and a more deadpan use of the term – can be present in the work of practically anybody active within the field of contemporary art, it could also be used as an escape route for someone who, like myself, is responsible for graduating fifteen curatorial students per year. Where will they find work? Given the proliferation of curatorial programs across the globe, some creative thinking has to be done to determine which jobs they should look for. The existing curatorial positions simply won't suffice" (2010, 66).

This statement speaks volumes, and also takes some edge off Lind's otherwise strong argumentation on the usefulness, or rather, necessity, of thinking about

curating though the concept of the curatorial. Further, Lind continues on the same topic in a more recent interview:

When I started studying in 1986, there was no such thing as curatorial studies. But I don't think I would have chosen it anyway, because from an early stage I felt that curating is something you learn by doing. Most of the interesting curators I know come from other fields rather than through curatorial programs. I advise younger smart people to study one thing thoroughly, whether it's languages, art history, science or philosophy, and to work with art on the side. I would not, as a young person today, spend two years of my life doing an MA in curating—if you want to work as a curator” (Kaverina 2016, 2).

In the end, though, did Lind really grasp onto the concept mainly in order to find a way not to feel guilty about producing curators to an art world which does not have curatorial jobs for them? What Lind instead suggests in these early texts, is that we could see making things happen in the departments of education, press, research, as belonging to an expanded field of the curatorial, which concerns work with art in different exhibitionary contexts. The curatorial does expand the field in a way that one can think one is working as part of the curatorial for example in education, public relations, marketing, or, as I have told myself, in research.

Another aspect I have been doubtful about, is the aspect of knowledge production. I tend to read the knowledge production discussed by Rogoff quite literally – as a requirement (or a burden?) towards a possible outcome of a curatorial practice, towards the practice and process itself, or towards an audience. For me, the notion of knowledge production has actually been quite provocative. I have contemplated on it as a demand toward curated projects to take part in creating and disseminating knowledge through art. This, again, could be understood as a statement about what is seen as important in work with art: creating knowledge. Thinking about production of knowledge, perhaps particularly in the context of curatorial projects within a political field, we need to raise questions on the role of the art – what does the work gain by being in the project? What kind of purposes does it serve, for itself or for the project as a whole? What does this mean from the point of view of the artist?

On the other hand, knowledge production could be as much understood as an abstract process the curator, the artist, the artwork, and a possible viewer are all necessarily a part of – a relation where different experiences and knowledges come together while encountering. An event of knowledge could be thought of in an abstract sense, as intuition or as a cognition, that is part of an affective experience as well. Because the ambivalence regarding ideas of knowledge production, I have decided to in this thesis use the concepts of affect, encounter and transformation. In another reading, these aspects could perhaps be incorporated as part of an abstract event of knowledge production. The curatorial appears as a useful tool when thinking about contemporary curating, and the forms it more and more often takes as discursive, collaborative, research- and process-based practices. The curatorial aims at departing from the work of art, and theorising the curatorial work as part of its functions. Emphasis is on the contingency in the process of unfolding. This takes us directly to the heart of things: the encounter with a work of art, and what this encounter can do. Hence, I do see the curatorial as a useful tool for discussing feminist practices within curating.

3 Curating and feminist thought

In this chapter, I go through and analyse current research in which curatorial practices and exhibition making are discussed within a feminist context. The focus isn't then straightforwardly on something we could call *feminist curating*, and instead, I see the wider frame of 'curating and feminist thought' as a more fertile setting for unravelling the different ways feminist politics has played part in curators' practices.⁶⁴ This chapter will not give a definition to how we might define feminist curating, or what feminist curating is, or can be, in practice. Neither does this chapter present a history of feminist exhibitions or art projects; I am not aiming at mapping the field in this sense. Rather, I shed light on the intertwinements of curating contemporary art and feminist theory and politics within the past few decades. I am examining these intertwinements above all in the light of recent critical writing on curatorial practices and feminisms.

In the early 2000s, almost parallel to the rapid increase in text produced about curators and curating, and the proliferation of curatorial postgraduate programmes, the art world witnessed another boom: a rapid expansion in production of large-scale exhibitions presenting feminist art and women artists' practices. These exhibitions, most often taking their form as retrospective surveys rather than thematic exhibitions, stating a relationship to feminist politics, and emerging at a time when feminist radical politics of the 1970s was becoming history, were arranged by major art museums, mainly in Europe, but also in Japan, the United States, Iceland and Russia, and during a time span between 2005-2011 (Robinson 2013, 129-130). These exhibitions have been important in making art made by feminist and women artists known more widely, and valuable also in provoking critical discussion about equality and representation in art museums, the relations between art and politics, and of course, the relations between feminist thought and

⁶⁴ A symposium titled *Curating in Feminist Thought* was held in May 2016 at Migros Museum and ZHdK in Zurich. Issue 29/May 2016 of *ONCURATING.org* has the same title, and presents papers from the symposium. <http://www.on-curating.org/issue-29.html#.W4FUei17FE4> (Accessed 25/08/2018).

curating. My thesis doesn't focus on analysing these exhibitions, which I am here discussing only briefly. Instead, the boom of exhibitions is a starting point for this thesis in the sense that reading literature on these survey exhibitions has led me to think about other possible ways of working with art and feminisms. I am elaborating this further throughout this chapter.

Feminist politics and art have been on a journey together since the 1960s. The history of feminist art and feminist art exhibitions remains unwritten, but it can be noted that it starts well before the year 2005 and the blockbuster exhibitions.⁶⁵ This research won't offer this kind of historical review, which could already on its own be a topic of several research projects. We have now, in 2018, passed the period of large-scale feminist exhibitions (for now), but feminism remains a current and vibrant topic in the field of contemporary art. Just as an example, at the moment of writing up this thesis in the summer of 2018, feminism was the thematic topic of *e-flux journal* (No. 92, June 2018), with another issue on the same topic following in September 2018.⁶⁶ In the editorial text, Julieta Aranda and Kaye Cain-Nielsen list how they imagine feminism(s) to be defined today:

Productions, reproductions, lineages, of / by female images—or “the female image”—whether in graphic or graphic novel or science fiction form. As well as, of course, discourses on feminisms in contemporary art. In the production of the heroine image. We are interested in contemporary art motherhood. Contemporary working artists in motherhood. Contemporary mothers in the area of art. We are interested, on a planetary level, in the de-gendering of the planet as mother. Relatedly, there is consideration for levels of planetary damage and toxicity and recognition of the phenomenon of “menvironmentalism.” ... We look to feminist space (besides and including outer). We looked to investigation, reflection, real fight and flight and deep celebration; we sought and seek to listen to read and present a symphonic, dissonant, layered, maximal collection on feminisms (Aranda & Cain-Nielsen 2018).

⁶⁵ Katy Deepwell has been collecting a comprehensive listing starting from 1971 on exhibitions focusing on feminism, feminist art and art made by women artists: <http://www.ktpress.co.uk/feminist-art-exhibitions.asp> (Accessed 25/08/2017).

⁶⁶ Also, several articles in *Mousse Magazine* (No. 64, Summer 2018) touched upon feminism; e.g. an interview with artist Kris Lemsalu, a discussion with Ericka Beckman, Dara Birnbaum and Lynn Hershman Leeson, and interviews with Ghislaine Leung and Ulrike Ottinger. *e-flux journal* issue 92, 6/2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/92>, (accessed 19/09/2018), and issue 93, 9/2018, <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/93/>, (accessed 19/09/2018).

Feminisms, as a movement and as a topic, remain topical in the art world. Partly because of this, it is important to think about different ways of putting feminism into practice as part of work with art.⁶⁷ I begin this chapter by discussing political aspects of curating, and move on to discussing the topic of gender equality in the art world. I present a case study from the Swedish art scene to clarify how gender equality may be worked on in art institutions. I am then discussing the aforementioned feminist survey exhibitions, and analyse the critical context they have been taken as part of. To conclude the chapter, I am discussing feminism in relation to contemporary curatorial discourses, and thinking about the possibilities for a curatorial practice in which feminism is embedded.

Politics of curating and political curating

When discussing feminist curatorial approaches and practices, curator Renée Baert points out that unrecognised feminist aspirations have historically been unfolded as part of generally more critical, or political, practices of curating (2010, 177).

Respectively, I begin here by looking for notions of feminist curatorial approaches in a slightly vaster context of political curating. As I present in the previous chapter, explicitly political frameworks, let alone feminist ones, are not widely discussed in mainstream texts concerning contemporary curating. Yet, the practice of curating itself is recognised to have political significance, as curatorial work carries with itself for example economic and social consequences and actively takes part in the process of “world-making”. Curatorial practices are not neutral or *innocent* activities, as for example O’Doherty (1976/1999), O’Neill (2007, 2012) and Filipovic (2013) have noted, but always alive through different kinds of ideological, personal, and thematic discourses.

⁶⁷ Symposia, talks, events and conferences on feminism, art and curating have not ceased to exist either. In July 2017 Nottingham Contemporary arranged a discussion with the title ‘Feminist curating; an active network?’ as part of their New Institutionalities #2 event series; symposium ‘Unsettling Feminist Curating’ was arranged at The Academy of Fine Arts Vienna in December 2017; and in April 2018 University of California, Berkley arranged a roundtable talk ‘Feminist Curatorial Practices’.

While the role of the curator as an author has become stronger, it is clear that a curator's responsibility over what an exhibition or a project conveys and mediates, has been growing parallel to this.⁶⁸ There are curators and curatorial collectives that work explicitly with political agendas, and not only in the margins of the art world. I am not focusing specifically on these actors in this study, but regarding active collectives working in the mainstream art world (meaning that these two collectives have for example curated international biennials) one can mention What, How & for Whom (WHW), formed in 1999 in Zagreb, Croatia, by Ivet Ćurlin, Ana Dević, Nataša Ilić, Sabina Sabolović, and Dejan Kršić. Another example is Raqs Media Collective, founded in 1992 by Jeebesh Bagchi, Monica Narula and Shuddhabrata Sengupta in New Delhi, India. In a feminist context, one can mention for example Kuratorisk Aktion, founded in 2005 in Denmark by curators Frederikke Hansen and Tone Olaf Nielsen, as well as h.arta, founded in 2001 by artists Maria Crista, Anca Gyemant and Rodica Tache in Timisoara, Romania. Collective work is proven to be a useful strategy for curators working with political agendas. Collective and political work with art and curating could, again, be a topic for a research on its own.⁶⁹ More than curatorial ethics and responsibility though, I am here interested in political aspirations manifesting in curatorial practices: the will and intention to cause shifts, changes and transformations in a larger social and cultural context.

As discussed in the previous chapter, writing on curating by curators has reached a more critical stance during the first decade of the 2000s; to a certain extent, this critical discourse does entail nuances of political consciousness as well (e.g. Filipovic & Vanderlinden 2005; Filipovic 2013; O'Neill 2012; O'Neill, Wilson & Steeds 2016).

⁶⁸ As a few examples: Raqs Media Collective's article "Curatorial Responsibility" (2010) in *The Biennial Reader: An anthology on large-scale perennial exhibitions of contemporary art*, (eds.) Filipovic, E., van Hal, M., and Øvstebø; *Manifesta Journal* No. 12 (2010/2011) is dedicated to the topic of ethics; *Rotterdam Dialogues: The Critics, The Curators, The Artists* (2010) edited by Zoë Gray, has specific focus on the responsibility of the curator; and Kunsthalle Wien arranged a conference in April 2015 on curatorial ethics (<http://kunsthallewien.at/#/en/events/curatorial-ethics>, Accessed 03/07/2017).

⁶⁹ A relatively recent PhD research on collective curating is "The End of The Curator: On Curatorial Acts as Collective Production of Knowledge" (2016) by Corina Oprea (Loughborough University). More on collective curating also in *Manifesta Journal*, Issue 8 "Collective curating".

Norwegian curators and scholars Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland have been particularly interested in the question of political potential of curating, and have edited an interview issue on the topic in *ONCURATING.org* (2010) including interviews with curators Mary Anne Staniszewski, Simon Sheikh, Paul O'Neill and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. A continuation to this is the anthology *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections* (2015). In 2010 Amundsen and Mørland situate the political potential of curating in the status of the exhibition, and the roles an exhibition can play in a larger social and cultural context (2010, 1). As an example, one can think about biennials and other mega exhibitions, that most often gain visibility and echo outside themselves and their geographical surroundings. The focus is set on the scale of a project, and the visibility it may gain amongst audiences. Amundsen and Mørland argue, that the critical focus has altogether shifted from the work of art to the exhibition, as the field of curating and its critical analysis has been establishing itself. Further, they see the exhibition above all as a space for the curator “to agitate, speak and be listened to” (2010, 1).

In the interview with Amundsen and Mørland, Mary Anne Staniszewski thinks about the curatorial realm through notions of power and responsibility:

Curating has political potential in that it is one type of media that contributes to public discourses and the public domain. An exhibition – including those in smaller or alternative spaces – has the potential to seep, spread, influence, transform and change culture. Therefore I feel that curators have a responsibility to engage with the critical issues of our time (2010, 3).

Here Staniszewski puts a lot of weight to the medium of the exhibition, and its affective potential of touching viewers and even transforming their lives, or at least their understanding of the world. Throughout the interview Staniszewski nods to the problem of art and life being made separate within museum institutions and their white cube spaces. According to her, it is this connection between life and art that curators need to re-establish, and which is the basis for political curatorial work. The de-mystifying of the relationship between art and life brings art closer to the sphere of the everyday and the political.

Also Simon Sheikh sees the curatorial position always as a political one. In the interview with Amundsen and Mørland, he says: “What I think that curating *should* do, is to be implemented in community building and not just be a representation of the non-object and the non-market. I think that is where the potential of curating lies, in the power to turn the aesthetic into something else” (2010, 4). Sheikh points out the same problem as Staniszewski, along with emphasizing the political aspects, working as part of the curatorial process. Curating is always political, as it can be understood as making a statement about a selected issue. Further, *a curatorial position* is always political, being located in a middle management position between economic, administrative and aesthetic concerns.

According to Amundsen and Mørland, there has been a change in how politics manifests in curatorial work: rather than politics acting as a theme of an exhibition, curators tend to work on politics by using radical political strategies, for example by processual and participatory means “such as education, organized discussions, interventions, collaborative working methods and text production” (2010, 1). In the interviews, a lot of emphasis is put on the form of curatorial practice, and what kind of methods and processes it involves. Curating is here thought of above all as a discursive practice involving different participants, the curator being only one of them. In relation to this, it is interesting that Amundsen and Mørland simultaneously emphasize the role of the curator as the author, as the one who sets out the exhibition space in order “to agitate, speak and be listened to” (2010, 1).

In the anthology *Curating and Politics Beyond the Curator: Initial Reflections*, Amundsen and Mørland aim to unravel the complexities of politics operating as part of curatorial projects. The focus is on the production of a curatorial event – be it an exhibition, an event, a book – with the aim of shifting focus from the curator and institutional critique as a form of politics, to the larger political signification of other aspects of curatorial projects – such as education, fundraising, sponsoring, and marketing (2015, 21-24). Their aim, thus, connects to the wider field of the curatorial. Amundsen and Mørland also suggest, that an oppositional position has been built-in as part of the contemporary curatorship. Using early curatorial classics,

O'Doherty's *Inside the white cube* (1976/1986) and Staniszewski's *The power of display* (1998) as examples of discourses that have informed the current generation of emerging curators to *oppose* to power structures in the art spaces these texts illuminated in their time (2015, 23-24). This is confirmed in O'Neill's study (2012), as part of his inquiry into contemporary discursive practices.

Amundsen and Mørland situate the political potential of curating in the position of a curator, the positions of their collaborators, the curated projects, but above all in a project's relation to the world surrounding it. Here, we are again with the question: what can an exhibition do? However, I find it problematic the art exhibited is not mentioned here as one of the key elements. In their earlier interview collection (2010), art seemed to play a more central role. In the discussion between Amundsen, Mørland and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, her reply to the question concerning political potential of curating does address the role of art, as well as the curator's work with it. She also situates the political potential of curating quite surprisingly in relation to the other interviewees:

An art exhibition cannot change the fact that we use fossil fuel. But I think that it can change the singular individual visitor, in terms of the way that he or she experiences time or space, or the way in which that person moves from one chair to another. On a phenomenological level, it is about how the audience experiences the world, and about how it processes that experience and constructs knowledge. This means that what is political is how long the wall label is, how the curator uses the grammar in it and how high up it is placed on the wall. This is what the politics of the exhibition is all about. And one that is somehow worked upon, in the way that you work with a physiotherapist, then the rest of the life of that individual visitor may be emancipated. And then the exhibition *may* have made one of the exhibition goers choose differently the next time he or she is going to vote (2010, 10).

How Christov-Bakargiev sees the connection between art and politics is indirect, and at the same time, very pragmatic. The practical level of the event of politics seems to insinuate the weight of small yet constitutive gestures (such as formulation and positioning of a wall text), and at the same time the contingency in the desired effect of a curatorial choice. From the point of view of the curator, the political potential appears to arise here in practical work with *enabling* and *mediating*, working as a middle-woman between a work of art and a viewer. In the end the focus is little

on the *role* of the curator, but rather, on the work of art and what the work itself possesses, as well as *how the curator is able to introduce the work to the viewer*. This is the approach I am interested in investigating further, and will do so within the following chapters.

I have now established that curatorial practices do entail political potential, and it manifests in the work a curator does with art. Referring to the modes of feminist curating presented earlier, I am now discussing feminist contexts in the light of existing research through the topics of 1) gender equality, 2) thematic feminist exhibitions, and 3) feminist curatorial practice.

Gender equality in art institutions

Focusing momentarily on the political potential embedded in curatorial work with exhibitions and collections mainly within museum institutions, I am considering the topic of gender equality in the art world. Gender equality is an issue that doesn't concern independent curatorial practice in the extent it does curatorial work in a museum. As part of an independent practice, it is perhaps more a question of living up to one's values, or a matter of conscience. However, as the topic is central in terms of feminist politics, I am bringing it into my analysis. One strand of projects that grew out of the renewed interest in feminisms in the art world since 2005, has focused explicitly on gender equality and representation of women artists' work in collections, acquisitions and programming within museums and galleries. Taking a good look at almost any museum, biennial or gallery statistics on gender representation, one can state that gender equality has not been reached in the art world, nor has equality definitely been reached when considering other variables of identity, such as ethnicity, nationality and class.⁷⁰ Hence, gender representation in

⁷⁰ As an example, a breakdown of artists in terms of gender, race, nationality, participation and age in Venice Biennale in 2017: <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-venice-biennale-artists-numbers> (accessed 27/07/2017). Venice Biennale is one of the mega-exhibitions that is understood to represent a relevant review of current contemporary art scene every other year.

museums and galleries remains an issue to be worked on.⁷¹ Iconic feminist collective Guerrilla Girls has been working relentlessly on the topic since 1985, and the work continues today.⁷²

Often cited feminist projects on gender equality within museum contexts include *The Second Museum of Our Wishes*, started in 2006 at Moderna Museet in Stockholm (discussed in this chapter); the inauguration of Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007; *elles@centrepompidou*, a re-hanging of the collection of the National Museum of Modern Art in France, by exhibiting solely works made by women artists, at Centre Pompidou 2009-2011; and the project *Modern Women: Women Artists in the Museum of Modern Art* from 2010, which is a publication interrogating the history of collecting at MoMA in New York, as well as documenting works by women artists stored in the museum, but rarely exhibited on its walls.

elles@centrepompidou consisted of a re-hanging of the permanent collection of the National Museum of Modern Art in France with solely works by women artists. The exhibition featured works by 150 artists from the beginning of 1900s till early 2000s. The hanging was changed during the exhibition period, and it presented pieces from the collections of fine art, photography, cinema and design. The collection exhibition was on from May 2009 to February 2011.⁷³ The re-hanging was curated by Camille Morineau⁷⁴. She acted also as the editor of the exhibition catalogue,

⁷¹ On gender equality in the art world in *The Guardian* 6 Feb 2017: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/feb/06/how-the-art-world-airbrushed-female-artists-from-history>; A project on statistics in in the US: <https://hyperallergic.com/117065/tallying-art-world-inequality-one-gallery-at-a-time/>; and an equivalent project on statistics in Australia: <http://thecountessreport.com.au> (all accessed 27 June 2017).

⁷² <https://www.guerrillagirls.com> (accessed 27 June 2017).

⁷³ The exhibition period was initially going to be approximately a year, but it was extended to one year and nine months, mainly because of positive public response (Robinson 2013, 144).

⁷⁴ Camille Morineau has continued her work with women artists in AWARE: Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions, co-founded by Morineau in Paris in 2014. AWARE aims at “restoring the presence of 20th century women artists in the history of art”, by creating, indexing and distributing information on 20th century women artists (<https://awarewomenartists.com/>, accessed 4 July 2017).

which includes a variety of articles focusing on women artists and feminism. The main aim of *elles@centrepompidou* was to present the history of modern art through women artists' work. According to Morineau (2009), the exhibition was put together at the time only because the collection was finally, and at the same time, *only then* able to present this history through the works it contained.⁷⁵ This despite the fact that at the time of putting together the display, works by women artists comprised 18 per cent of the museum's collections altogether, and 25 per cent of the contemporary collection (2009, 15).

In the catalogue text, Morineau states: "The Mnam [Musée national d'art modern] is exhibiting only women, and yet the goal is neither to show that female art exists nor to produce a feminist event, but to present the public with a hanging that appears to offer a good history of twentieth-century art" (2009, 16). Indeed, as Morineau states, she did not curate the exhibition as a feminist act, or present works by women artists as a feminist exhibition. Earlier in her text, while speculating on the possible reception of *elles* and the reasons for making the decision to look at the museum collection through gender difference, Morineau on the other hand notes: "Why is it still considered such bad taste to perform an act that might be interpreted as 'feminist' in a country where male/female equality is proclaimed as a necessity yet is so far from being achieved?" (2009, 16). Thus, *elles* does entail a problematic relationship with feminism: according to the curator it is not a feminist exhibition, and the act of exhibiting only women artists' works is not a feminist act, while she does admit it can be perceived of as such. Further, if perceived as such, the curator suggests it shouldn't be understood as the core idea of the exhibition, as France claims to be an equal country in terms of gender in any case. Hilary Robinson describes the paradox in her analysis of the curatorial intentions of *elles*:

⁷⁵ In her analysis of *elles*, Hilary Robinson notes that this is an unresolved fact in most museums: the collections do not contain enough works by women artists, so that the museum could present their art historical narratives through their collections from this perspective. For example, this was confirmed by curators of MoMA, New York at the symposium *Art Institutions and Feminist Politics Now* in May 2010; the curators agreed that only MoMA's photography department had systematically included works by women artists in the collection, and was the only department that could exhibit an art historical narrative based on these works (Robinson 2013, 144).

Where the frustration lay for a feminist viewer of *elles@centrepompidou* was in the gap between on the one hand the assumption that simply ‘being a woman’ would be sufficient to make a coherent exhibition, and on the one hand the rejection of the category ‘woman’ in favour of the individualism inherent in the feminine plural ‘elles’ (Robinson 2013, 146-147).

Robinson clearly reads the exhibition from a feminist perspective, and not the one desired by the curator (the re-hanging as a history of modern art, only displayed through women artists’ work). I find it problematic, that in her catalogue text, Morineau implicitly shifts the responsibility of the content of the show both to the collection itself, and to the artworks it displays: “Displaying the collections is not the same as mounting an exhibition: the works are already there, the choices have already been made” (2009, 15). In a sense, what the curator is saying is that whether the works mediate for example a feminist message, it is because of the works themselves, not because of any curatorial choice. The view is interesting in terms of giving a strong agency to the artworks in the collection, but at the same time problematic, as it neglects the curatorial responsibility, that of course, despite Morineau’s statement, is necessarily part of a curatorial process, even when installing a display of a collection, alongside selecting, installing and contextualising. Considering Morineau’s curatorial statement, the works in the display, and the catalogue, which clearly contextualises the project in a feminist context, *elles* does indeed set out an ambiguous message on its relation to feminist politics.

The anthology *Politics in a glass case: feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions* (2013) edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, takes as its starting point the musealisation of feminist art and politics as part of the large-scale exhibitions on feminist art. Partly because of this focus, the publication necessarily addresses issues concerning gender equality. For example, Lara Perry (2013) critically analyses gender representation in Tate Modern’s collection exhibitions in relation to the public image production the museum engages in, and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe and Malin Hedlin Hayden (2013) discuss gender politics in the context of Moderna Museet in Stockholm (which I present in more detail below). Here a total of five essays focus on unravelling gender politics specifically in terms of museum collections.

I was living in Stockholm, Sweden between 2009 and 2013. While entering the art world in the city, I had the chance to follow closely local discussions on gender equality and feminisms. *The Second Museum of Our Wishes (TSMoOW)* was a project initiated in 2006 at Moderna Museet in Stockholm by Lars Nittve, the director of the museum at the time. In the wake of the museum's 50th anniversary, the project started as a reaction to the realisation that early modernism was represented 15 per cent by women artists and 85 per cent by men artists in the museum's collections (2010, 15). Another realisation was, that where male artists were most often present in the collection with key works, this was not the case with women artists, who were represented by more marginal works in their careers (2010, 17). Another starting point was a reference to the museum's history, *The Museum of Our Wishes*, initiated in 1963 by the museum director Pontus Hultén as part of Moderna Museet's 5th year anniversary. Hultén acquired 5 million Swedish kronor from the state for *The Museum of Our Wishes*, in order to complement the collections with modernist masterpieces. All of the pieces acquired were works by men artists. As a reaction to this, Nittve wanted to make things right, and gather an equivalent sum of money, in 2006 coming up to 50 million kronor, in order to fill in the gaps with works by women artists. The museum was able to fundraise 42 million kronor, mainly as private donations, as only 5 million was donated in the end by the government. With the donations, 26 works by 14 women artists were acquired into the collection of Moderna Museet.⁷⁶

Visiting Moderna Museet's collection displays in 2009 and afterwards, one could see the words "The Second Museum of Our Wishes" on the labels of the works that had been acquired as part of the project. The project was accompanied by a publication with essays and presentations of artists whose works were acquired as part of the project. In her essay curator Ann-Sofi Noring (2010) discusses the significance of *TSMoOW* to Moderna Museet, clearly aiming to clear out any

⁷⁶The artists are Louise Bourgeois, Judy Chicago, Susan Hiller, Tora Vega Holmström, Anna Kegan, Mary Kelly, Hilma af Klint, Barbara Kruger, Lee Lozano, Alice Neel, Lyubov Popova, Carolee Schneemann, Monica Sjöö and Dorothea Tanning.

criticism on the project being a tick to the box of gender equality. On the one hand Noring stresses the importance of the gesture: “The very presence of these works makes a difference, they cause a shift in the apparently cemented order of things” (2010, 37), while on the other, she stresses it is not enough: “Just adding a work to the collection, regardless of whether it is put in storage or on show, is not going to change anything” (2010, 37). Curator John Peter Nilsson presents and analyses the reception of the project, mostly through reactions published in Swedish newspapers (2010, 21-35). Alongside the mixed responses⁷⁷, Nilsson does not forget to describe the project as a pioneering, heroic gesture by Moderna Museet, and how it was well received of especially outside Sweden in the international art world. In Nilsson’s description, *TSMoOW* appears as a precedent, if not even the initiator, to the proliferation of exhibitions on feminist art and women artists’ practices in mainstream art institutions (2010, 29-35).

TSMoOW was incorporated in the functioning of the museum as a research project *In the Shadow Of: Women modernists from a gender oriented art history perspective in connection with Moderna Museet’s project The Second Museum of Our Wishes* between 2008-2010, funded by the Swedish National Council for Cultural Affairs. The project focused on feminist art theory and the marginalisation of women artists in art history. It consisted of lectures, essays, three public seminars (highlighting the work Dorothea Tanning; Carolee Schneemann; and Lee Lozano), and a conference arranged in collaboration with the *Transnational Perspectives on Women’s Art, Feminism and Curating* research network⁷⁸. The conference led to the publication of the anthology *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2010), edited by Stockholm-based art historians Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe.

⁷⁷ For example, Nilsson mentions twice the reaction of Gudrun Schyman, the spokeswoman for the Feminist Initiative party in Sweden, who suggested the museum instead should sell some of the works by male artists in their collections in order to break free from patriarchal structures of the collection (2010, 21, 25).

⁷⁸ The Leverhulme Trust funded International Research Network is a joint project between University of Brighton, Concordia University, The University of Edinburgh, Estonian Academy of Arts, and Stockholm University.

While the addition of works by iconic women artists into the collections can be seen as a feminist and political act in a *positive* light (attending to the gendered imbalance in a public art collection, discussing the representation of women artists in a public museum's collections, attention to and reflection on a public museum's acquisition policies and politics), there appeared also critical stances. There were the aforementioned comments by feminist politician Gudrun Schyman, who saw the project as a waste of tax money on fixing errors of a patriarchal society (even though in the end only 12 per cent of the project was funded by the government). According to her, a more effective way would have been to sell some of the valuable works by male modernists in the collection, and use these funds in the museum's activities in a more gender-balanced manner (Sjöholm Skrubbe & Hedlin Hayden 2013). Maria Lind criticised the project for being mere cosmetics, aiming rather for publicity than the operation of actual feminist politics in terms of working towards a gender balance in the museum's collections or exhibition programming (2011, 86).

Around the same time, researcher and writer Vanja Hermele's survey on gender equality in the Swedish art scene was published. *Konsten – så funkar det (inte)* [*Art – this is how it works (not)*] (2009) was commissioned by Artists' National Organisation in Sweden (KRO), and it presented hard facts and statistics about the reality of unfulfilled gender balance in several stately funded art institutions, as well as private ones. For the study Hermele collected statistics from institutions and conducted interviews with artists, heads of institutions from the Swedish cultural minister to museum curators and gallerists. Interestingly enough, the report has been republished in 2017 as a digital book, including a new preface by Hermele.⁷⁹ The preface doesn't give a further reasoning for republishing it eight years later, though Hermele does mention that a new report is needed to represent the current situation. The act of republishing the survey does show though, that the topic is still seen as relevant, and it is offered for discussion anew. In the new preface Hermele describes her negative experiences after the report came out in 2009, having received angry emails, messages and phone calls, mainly from male actors in the art

⁷⁹ <http://www.kro.se/content/digital-utgåva-av-konsten---så-funkar-det-inte-0> (Accessed 26/08/2017).

field (2009, iii-vi). What she learned about the art world in the process, was that it is the most guarded field she had researched, with strong and hidden power relations and a network of people gatekeeping it. What the report revealed, was that there is a huge lack of statistics in art organisations, museums and galleries (both publicly and privately funded), and also, Hermele was able to articulate a gamut of defence mechanisms used in order to dodge and deny questions on equality being relevant in the field of art (2009, iii-iv).

The question Hermele asked in her report was: “what prevents art from being equal?”. She extracted four explanations given by the actors in the field, which in turn explained why and how inequality is kept alive: 1) the argument that the focus needs to be on art, not equality (that for example decisions on acquisitions and exhibition programming are based on art, not the gender of the artist); 2) a tendency to avoid responsibility (saying that equality already exists, or that inequality existed in the institution before the interviewed person started working there); 3) a view that there is actually a need to look after men now, as it is middle-aged white men that have become the minority because of all the focus on equality and positive discrimination in favour of women; and 4) ignorance of the fact that in terms of representation, salaries and grants, the field of visual arts is simply not equal for women and men⁸⁰.

Hermele’s study shows, not only that the Swedish art world functions in a way that makes it harder for women artists to get the same level of visibility or to get paid equally to their male colleagues, but also that looking at statistics and facts enables us to analyse some of the reasons behind the inequality. By analysing the rhetoric of talking about gender equality and the thought forms behind it, Hermele shows that the reasons for the statistics lie in entrenched attitudes and presumptions concerning gender equality – equality is most often seen as unnecessary, exaggerated

⁸⁰ An example of a concrete and alarming finding in Hermele’s study was that for example in 2008, 24 women and 17 men received grants for art projects from the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. This appeared promising, but when looking at the amount of money that was granted, it turned out that the 24 women artists received 56 208 SEK in total, while the total sum for the fewer 17 men was nearly the double: 101 235 SEK (2009, 89).

or threatening in an art context (2009, 103). Hermele's study shows why paying close attention to statistics in terms of representation is essential, above all in the activities of publicly funded art institutions.

I argue, that in the foundations, working on gender balance is the motivator also in the blockbuster exhibitions presenting feminist art and/or art made by women alongside the aims of feminist critique of art history: these projects aim to create balance to representation of feminist and women artists, who have been ignored or downplayed in the Western art historical canon, built according to male artists' mastery. I am here locating these projects in an art historical, rather than a curatorial context. For example, *elles@centrepompidou* was based on an art historical narrative, despite the arrangement in thematic chapters, filling in the gaps of the male canon by presenting women artists' works in a space (the permanent collections at Centre Pompidou) that in other occasions dismisses women artists' pieces and narratives. The work on researching and presenting art made by women, historical and contemporary, alongside the persistent work on equality in terms of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, generation and nationality, is highly important in museum institutions. I suggest, however, that working on gender equality can be seen as a first grounding step of curating and feminist thought, and that the approach can be taken further. As Ann-Sofi Noring mentions, adding a work in a collection is not enough, particularly considering the major role museum institutions have had, and still have today, in art historical canon-building through their collection policies. It can also be asked, if *elles* or *TSMoOW* in any way unsettled or dismantled the art historical canon? For a museum context, perhaps a more efficient model could be offered by Helen Molesworth's idea of installing collection exhibitions as a process of "associative chain", a horizontal non-linear structure in which all ideas have the possibility of connecting to all other ideas⁸¹; and dismissing the tradition canonical thinking, which simply doesn't do justice to women artists' work (2010, 504-507). As Molesworth puts it: "If we think according to the logic of the rhizome, we can

⁸¹This relates to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome (1987).

see that history is filled with gaps and fissures *and* moments of connection and synchronicity, and that while there is loss and neglect (as there is regarding the history of art made by women), there are also alliances formed despite geographical distance and temporal incommensurability” (2010, 507). Molesworth’s model of a rhizomatic sisterhood-hanging of a museum collection, in order to create linkages between women artists’ work, is a clear example of affirmative feminist practice, where a new approach does not cancel out the old one, but instead creates affinities with previous legacies.⁸²

Exhibitions about feminist art and/or art made by women

As I’ve already mentioned, this thesis does not concentrate on the history or analysis of feminist exhibitions, or the boom of blockbuster exhibitions on feminisms and art made by women artists.⁸³ It has also already been stated, how art has been a close companion of feminist politics and praxis since the 1960s, and this has manifested itself regularly throughout these 35-40 years in the form of artistic practices, exhibitions, and other projects. The feminist exhibitions of today have a selection of predecessors in the past. In her article “The Feminist Nomad: The All-Women Group Show” (2007) published in the *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* catalogue, Jenny Sorkin writes about all-women cooperative gallery structures, focusing primarily on the situation in the United States in the 1970s. Sorkin points out, that the urgency to set up own spaces for women was a direct response to the absence of women artists’ work in museums and galleries (and even other imagery produced by women in the public realm more generally) (2007, 459). The essay is followed by a selected chronology of all-women group exhibitions between 1943-1983, compiled by Sorkin and Linda Theung (2007, 473-499). The listing gives an

⁸² I am returning to the similar model of curating as part of Catherine de Zegher’s and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s practices.

⁸³ Again, it is a starting point in the sense that I am aiming at renegotiating the paradigm these exhibitions have presented to feminist curating: that of a retrospective survey exhibition on feminist art and/or art by women artists. It is about taking distance to an art historical approach and moving towards a critical curatorial one.

indication of the long history of all-women exhibitions, context for *WACK!*, and most importantly, emphasizes the fact that historically women artists have been to a large extent responsible for arranging spaces and situations for presenting their art themselves.⁸⁴

I'm discussing the history of feminist exhibitions only briefly, by presenting some of the projects in the light of exhibition catalogues and recent critical writings on them. As mentioned, an extensive history of feminist exhibitions has not yet been written, but the project has been started partly by Katy Deepwell as a listing on her website⁸⁵, by Jenny Sorkin and Linda Theung in the *WACK!* catalogue (2007), and by Maura Reilly in her recent publication *Curatorial Activism* (2018). I did not have the chance to see any of the feminist blockbuster exhibitions in person, and have acquainted them only through documentation in catalogues and images, as well as the art historical writings, which I present in more detail in the following sub-chapter. I will present here briefly seven often-cited exhibition projects, in order to paint a picture of the nature of the exhibitions.

Konstfeminism was a touring exhibition, focusing on Swedish art in the framework of gender and feminism from 1970s to the early 2000s, created as a collaboration between three Swedish art institutions and art historian Barbro Werkmäster.⁸⁶ The exhibition was shown between 2005 and 2007 at Dunkers kulturhus in Helsingborg,

⁸⁴ In the context of alternative artist-run art spaces, the women's art space A.I.R. in New York and its origins in feminist politics is discussed in Sandy Nairne's article "The institutionalization of Dissent" (1996) in *Thinking about Exhibitions*. In the anthology *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance* (2007), edited by Judith Rugg and Michèle Sedgwick, Catherine Elwes' article "A Parallel Universe: The "Women's" Exhibitions at the ICA, 1980, and the UK/Canadian Film and Video Exchange, 1998-2004" focuses on all-women exhibitions and the efforts in the 1970s and 1980s in creating spaces for exhibiting art made by women. These two articles focusing explicitly on feminism as a political practice aiming at creating space for women artists in the male-dominated art world, are the only ones on the topic I have come across in mainstream publications about exhibition-making and curating.

⁸⁵ <http://www.ktpress.co.uk/feminist-art-exhibitions.asp> (Accessed 25/08/2017).

⁸⁶ The arranging bodies were Swedish Exhibition Agency, Liljevalchs konsthall and Dunkers kulturhus. The curatorial team as a whole consisted of Louise Andersson, Anna Livion Ingvarsson, Magnus Jensner, Anna Nyström, Barbro Werkmäster and Niclas Östlind.

Liljevalchs konsthall in Stockholm, Hälsinglands museum in Hudiksvall, and at Gothenburg Art Museum. *Konstfeminism* was one of the first large-scale projects focusing on feminism, gender and art in public museums at the beginning of the boom.⁸⁷ In English, the title translates to *Art Feminism – Strategies and consequences in Sweden from the 1970s till today*. The idea of ‘art feminism’ was a crucial part of the curatorial concept. Rather than creating and presenting a narrative of feminist art in Sweden, the exhibition presented artworks in an ‘art feminist framework’ (Nystöm et al. 2005, 29). The focus was on how art gains significance in relation to political movements, and how art can be seen and read in a feminist context. As the main focus was on exploring how gender politics have manifested in artistic practices, the exhibition also explored what kind of feminist strategies artists have used in their practices over the years, how art has been informed by political movements, and what kind of consequences this ‘art feminism’ has had in the Swedish society (2005, 9-29). The exhibition presented works by both women and men.

Kiss Kiss Bang Bang. 45 Years of Art and Feminism was shown at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum in 2007. It was curated by Xabier Arakistain, and presented works by 36 artists and 3 feminist groups from different countries. The exhibition critically examined what since the 1960s has come to be known as ‘feminist art’ and the feminist movement within art, through unravelling stereotypical associations, ideas and images regarding ideas on feminist art, as well as gender roles and the idea of the woman artist. As Robinson notes the concept of the exhibition was constructed around questions concerning feminist politics as a social movement, and the themes the exhibition was constructed around, related directly to political and activist themes from feminist politics and the women’s movement (2013, 138-139). Also *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* presented works by both women and men.

Another vast exhibition in Europe, *Rebelle: Art & Feminism 1969-2009*, was shown at the Museum of Modern Art in Arnhem, Netherlands in 2009. The exhibition was

⁸⁷ Other exhibitions with similar focus in 2005 were *MOT Annual 2005: Life Actually, The Works of Contemporary Japanese Women* at Museum of Contemporary Art in Tokyo, Japan; and *La Costilla Maltida*, Centro Atlántico de Arte Moderno, Gran Canaria.

curated by Mirjam Westen. The show examined the impact of feminist activism and theory in art during a 40-year period. The exhibition presented works by 87 artists, and had a strong transnational approach; 20 of the artists were Dutch or at the moment based in the Netherlands, 18 of them were from Africa and the Middle East, and the rest of the artist were from Baltic countries, Asia, Latin America and the United States. The show brought together and juxtaposed works by artists from different generations, presenting work by legendary feminist artists side by side contemporary emerging artists, creating connections and disconnections between them. Robinson notes, that even though the exhibition had a historical aspect, feminism was presented as an active and ongoing movement, by exhibiting local and contemporary artists' work in the last exhibition rooms before exiting the show (2013, 141).

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution was an extensive touring exhibition that featured works by 120 women artists from 21 countries. The exhibition was curated by Cornelia Butler, and between 2007 and 2009 it was shown at The Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA) in Los Angeles, The National Museum of Women in the Arts in Washington D.C., PS1 in New York, and Vancouver Art Gallery. *WACK!* examined the legacy of art made under the influence of feminist thought, presenting art made alongside radical feminist activism between 1965 and 1980. Presenting feminist art more or less as an art movement, the exhibition aimed at articulating the relationship between feminist thought and activism in art. The exhibition was accompanied by a vast catalogue including a curatorial text as well as ten other essays contextualising the exhibition in feminist politics. Another extensive exhibition in the United States, *Global Feminisms*, presented feminist art by 80 women artists from around the world, with focus on art from the 1990s to early 2000s. The exhibition was curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin as the inaugural exhibition at the Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum in 2007. The goal was to present contemporary feminist art from a global perspective, and to move beyond a Western brand of feminism that has been perceived as the dominant voice of feminist and artistic practice since the early 1970s. Also *Global Feminisms* was accompanied by a vast exhibition catalogue

featuring curatorial essays from both of the curators of the exhibition, as well as seven art historical essays by international writers opening up and contextualising the exhibition through feminist movements on different continents, according to the curatorial approach.

Gender Check. Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe was shown between 2009 and 2010 at the Museum of Modern Art in Vienna, and the National Gallery of Art in Warsaw. The exhibition was curated by Bojana Pejic as part of a larger research project, and in collaboration with twenty-six art historians, cultural theorists and curators from Eastern Europe. The exhibition featured works by more than 200 Eastern European artists, both women and men, starting in the 1960. The exhibition followed the shifts and changes in the representation of male and female role models in art, taking a particular look at how they developed under different socio-political conditions during the socialist period and its aftermath, taking the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 as a watershed. *Gender Check* aimed to unravel links to contemporary gender discourses from a period that was little researched until the project started. Indeed, the publication *Gender Check: A Reader*, which accompanied the project in addition to an exhibition catalogue, was “the first representative collection of texts dealing with concepts and discourses investigating gender in social, cultural, and artistic contexts within Eastern Europe” (Pejic 2010, 9). The project as a whole was a complex discursive and cross-disciplinary project, aiming not only presenting and discussing art and its relations to socio-political conditions and change, but also at producing knowledge on a field that wasn’t properly investigated.

In Pejic’s introductory text in the *Gender Check: A Reader*, the exhibition is presented as one part of a larger project, aiming to start a conversation concerning gender in the context of socialist and post-socialist eras in Eastern Europe. Pejic notes, that the role of images – both artworks and popular images – is vital in a constitution of an ideology; art doesn’t merely illustrate or mirror social conditions, but works of art act as active and productive parts of it (2010, 16-17). Regarding specifically the relationship between art and feminist thought, the last chapter of *Gender Check: A*

Reader focuses on mapping feminist events and feminist art practices in nine Eastern European countries. The importance of the exhibition project echoes in the article anthology *Working with feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2012), edited by Katrin Kivimaa, as Pejić's work on *Gender Check* is mentioned in each article of the publication.

Re.Act.Feminism. A performing Archive was a project on feminisms and performance art, started in 2008, and which travelled through six European countries between 2011 and 2013. The project, curated by Bettina Knaup and Beatrice E. Stammer, was based on continuous research on feminist, gender critical and queer performance art from historical and contemporary points of view. The project consisted of an archive, exhibitions, workshops, performances, and talks. The core of the project was a mobile archive with a growing collection of videos, photographs and other documents. This transnational and cross-generational project featured works by over 180 artists and artist collectives from the 1960s to the beginning of the 1980s, as well as contemporary positions. The research focus was on Eastern and Western Europe, the Mediterranean and Middle East, the US and in Latin America. The archive can still be viewed online.⁸⁸

As this very brief introduction portrays, each of these large-scale exhibitions (and partly, research projects) have had their unique angles to the topic of feminisms and women artists' work. Generally speaking, most of them aimed to present a retrospective display, a survey, on either feminist art, or art made by women artists, or both, starting from the 1970s, and most often continuing to present day, presented in relation to selected contemporary art practices. The exhibitions offered rare opportunities to see canonized works by feminist and women artists, which despite their place in the canon, most often remain unseen in museum displays. The exhibitions presented also opportunities to see works by women artists who have still been kept in the margins of the art world. Some projects strived more explicitly to discuss the significance of feminist art practices as part of histories of art, the

⁸⁸ <http://www.reactfeminism.org/index.php> (Accessed 01/07/2018).

society, and in relation to the work that remains to be done today (*Konstfeminism; Gender Check*). Despite the great number of similar projects (here only a small number presented), the exhibitions that are most often mentioned as feminist blockbuster shows remain *elles@centrepompidou*, *Global Feminisms*, and *WACK!* – undoubtedly thanks to their settings at major art institutions in central European and North American capitals, as well as the visibility of their curators within academia, and partly also in the art world.

A number of publications on feminist exhibitions and curating appeared in the afterglow of the exhibitions.⁸⁹ The length of the list is to give an indication of the amount of literature that the emergence of the feminist blockbuster exhibitions sparked in the post-2005 era. Most part of these texts have, in some sense, come into existence as reactions to the feminist blockbuster exhibitions, or having adapted to this discourse later. I argue, that because of this, the feminist blockbuster exhibitions have formed as the main context for discussing feminisms, exhibition-making and curating. This is problematic, as feminist curatorial practices are here seen and discussed primarily as part of museum contexts, museum curator's work, and as the practical endeavour of realising historical and retrospective exhibition projects about feminist art and art made by women.⁹⁰ My aim in this thesis is to

⁸⁹ Some or several of these exhibitions are discussed in the following publications, which I am later returning to in more detail: *n.paradoxa*, volume 18, "Curatorial Strategies" (2006) edited by Renee Baert, *Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference* (2008) edited by Alexandra M. Kokoli, *The feminism and visual culture reader* (2010) edited by Amelia Jones, *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2010) edited by Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, *Working With Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2012) edited by Katrin Kivimaa, *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (2013) edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, *ONCURATING.org*, Issue 29, "Curating in Feminist Thought" (2016) edited by Elke Krasny, Lara Perry and Dorothee Richter, *Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces* (2016) edited by Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, and *Curatorial Activism: Towards an Ethics of Curating* (2018) by Maura Reilly. In addition, several articles, columns and reviews have been written in art journals, and the exhibitions have been discussed as part of conferences, symposia, and talks (see p.18) Feminism and art has also been discussing in special issues of art magazines, of which can be mentioned *Frieze*, Issue 105 (2007), *ARTnews*, Volume 108/Issue 11, "The feminist evolution" (2009), and *Texte zur Kunst*, Issue 84, "Feminismus" (2011).

⁹⁰ A relatively recent PhD research focusing on feminist work in museum institutions expands the discussion from realisation of thematic feminist exhibitions to organisational

unstable this paradigm, and find alternative ways of discussing feminism and curatorial practices. Next, I am unravelling this literature and the discourses presented in them further, in order to build on them approaches arising from independent curatorial practices and clearer links to current curatorial discourses.

Feminism + curating

As mentioned, several publications on feminist thought and curating have come into being as reactions to the re-emergence of feminist exhibitions in the art field. Particularly *Feminisms is Still Our Name* (2010) and *Politics in a Glass Case* (2013) address these exhibitions at length, along with the possibilities, as well as the challenges, brought up by the renewed interest in feminist politics and art made by women. However, it is good to remember discussion on feminist interventions in exhibitionary and curatorial practices has existed prior to these publications. In order to analyse the discourses on current writing on feminism and curating, I have divided the literature into two branches: one focuses on feminist curating as a practice in which feminist exhibitions are created; the other focuses on practices where feminist politics is part of the curatorial practice itself, and manifests in various ways in the curatorial practice.

Feminist exhibitions – an art historical approach

In the editorial text to ‘Curatorial Strategies’ issue of *n.paradoxa* (2006), Renée Baert notes that there is a clear gap in research about the history of feminist exhibitions (2006, 4). Twelve years later, an overarching history of *feminist exhibitions* and *feminist exhibition making* remains unwritten. There have, however, been several beginnings to this in the form of local histories about feminist exhibitions (Nyström et al. 2005: Sweden; Hedlin & Skrubbe 2010: Sweden; Kivimaa 2012: post-socialist Eastern

changes: *Feminist Curatorial Interventions in Museums and Organizational Change: Transforming the Museum from a Feminist Perspective* (2016) by Laura Diaz Ramos, University of Leicester.

European states), as well as more global histories with a focus on feminist blockbuster exhibitions (Dimitrakaki & Perry 2013; Reilly 2018). Several of the catalogues produced in conjunction with feminist blockbuster exhibitions⁹¹ include appendices which present historical overviews on feminist and/or all-women exhibitions (national and international primarily in relation to women's movement) in order to contextualise the exhibition at hand.

Perhaps, at this point, when the history of feminist exhibitions has not yet been written, we should pose some questions on the topic, namely: what is a feminist exhibition? What counts as a feminist exhibition? What makes an exhibition a feminist one? Is it about presenting women artists? Is it about deconstructing sexist and patriarchal structures of the art world, or perhaps even the realities *outside* the art world too? Is it about defining what feminist art is? And how is a feminist exhibition made; what are the questions of feminist curating? There are also the questions posed by Baert:

How are feminist issues, theories and debates manifest in contemporary curatorial practices? How has the field and the ideas and politics it engenders, and responds to, expanded from its earliest manifestations? What are some of the concepts, complexities and situations that inform and challenge feminist curators today? (Baert 2006, 4)

I will attempt to answer some of these questions here, in the light of publications on feminist exhibitions listed above.

Feminism Reframed: Reflections on Art and Difference (2008) edited by Alexandra M. Kokoli addresses the significance of feminist art history in a scholarly context as well as in the realm of visual culture. Emerging from a conference *Difference Reframed: Reflections on the Legacies of Feminist Art History and Visual Culture* (2006) at the University of Sussex, the publication presents a selection of papers by scholars and practitioners in the field of visual arts. Feminist curating and feminist exhibitions are

⁹¹ At least *Konstfeminism. Strategier och effekter i Sverige från 1970-talet till idag* (2005) edited by Anna Nyström et al.; *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) edited by Cornelia Butler; *elles@centrepompidou. Women Artists in the Collection of the Musée National d'Art Moderne* (2009), edited by Camille Morineau.

brought up in the essays through an outspoken art historical approach to the topic. In the introduction “Looking on, Bouncing Back” Alexandra M. Kokoli discusses *WACK!* in terms of feminist self-recognition (2008, 7-8). There is also a section on the curatorial, with articles employing feminist critique of exhibitions and more specifically, questions concerning representation. In her essay “Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Blockbuster Retrospective” Joanne Heath analyses the structures of retrospective solo exhibitions, and states that the production of these is not enough as a feminist act. At the end of the essay, Heath expands her analysis by thinking about Catherine de Zegher’s *Inside the Visible*, and the alternative curatorial approach used in it (2008, 34-36).

The anthology *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2010) has its origin in the conference *Feminisms, Historiography and Curatorial Practices*, held in 2008 at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm. According to the editors, Malin Hedlin Hayden and Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, the two main topics interrogated in the anthology are the question of the role of feminism in contemporary art – whether it is about identity politics, or the radical feminist political, critical, ideological and activist commitments and aims of the 1960s and 1970s; and the question of the sex-biased premise of the all-women exhibitions claiming themselves as feminist solely based on this (2010, xiv-xv). For example, Amelia Jones’ essay “The Return of Feminism(s) and the Visual Arts, 1970/2009” focuses on the problematic of emerging young women artists not recognising or appreciating the history of feminisms and feminist artists.⁹² Jones’ analysis concentrates primarily on the “bad girl” exhibitions of the late 1990s (2010, 16; also Deepwell 2006, 80), which negotiated gender identities from a so-called post-feminist point of view. Jones locates much of the renewed interest in feminism in the art world in capitalist flows in the art market, where “sexy feminist art” is appreciated mainly in relation to its market value. In her analysis, feminism has become nothing but a public relations tool for museums, and a commodity to

⁹²Through my own curatorial practice, I have such a different view on this topic. Many emerging women artists I have met, working somehow with feminisms and gender, have their references in writers such as Donna Haraway, bell hooks, or Gayatri Spivak, and artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Eva Hesse, or Lynda Benglis.

commercial galleries (2010, 16-17). In the end, it appears Jones is blaming mostly women artists from younger generations for the situation, and not as much the museum curators.

In another text, Jones discusses the topic further in a discussion “Feminist Curating and the “Return” of Feminist Art” with Connie Butler and Maura Reilly (Butler et al. 2010). All of them having art historical backgrounds, and all of them having also curated exhibitions on feminisms, the discussion circles around what each art historian, and curator, find important. Whereas Butler puts a lot of weight on interest towards artists’ practices, and sees the art as the most important starting point for her work, Jones and Reilly see the art historical contextualising of exhibitions as the most important aspect (2010, 32). Jones’ essay does not acknowledge any other view on feminist work with exhibitions than a creation of a historical exhibition about feminist art, which highlights the significance of earlier generations’ work. There is no room for discursive curatorial thinking, let alone independent curatorship. The possibilities to work with artists informed by feminism (as if this would be a necessity) become narrow, when there is only one right way of presenting the work. Here, the curatorial and art historical approaches merge in defining what is *proper* feminist art.

The two essays that actually touch upon curatorial practices in *Feminisms is Still Our Name*, and not only art historical readings of their end products, are by Griselda Pollock and Renée Baert. Opposing Jones’ wish to not forget the past, in her essay “Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive” Pollock urges us to focus on “the virtuality or the futurity of feminism rather than a retrospective burial of its dismembered and misremembered remains by current musealisations and exhibitions” (2010, 107).⁹³ At the core of Pollock’s essay is the

⁹³ Pollock discusses the concept of the virtual feminist museum in detail in her book *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, Space and the Archive* (2007). The concept is highly intriguing to me in terms of its focus on virtuality as a potential and becoming, but I have decided not to discuss it further within this research, as discussion on Pollock acquires a heavy feminist art historical context, which falls out of the borders of this study. Research on feminist curating could be taken further in the context of deconstructive

concept of the virtual feminist museum. As she notes, it is not “a cybernetic playground”, but relates to the notions of virtuality and actuality:

It is this liquid state that becomes a paradox for contemporary feminist criticism in so far as gender continues to be an issue if there is still gross sexist discrimination (which there is), or, where numbers of women are sufficient, the feminist argument appears redundant. What is being missed entirely is the virtuality of feminism as a continuing practice of creative production of the not-yet, the still to come, the unknowable dimensions of a world *not* built on the othering of the feminine, irrespective of what some women managed to negotiate as a less vile space in a white man’s world (2010, 108; emphasis original).

What Pollock suggests is, that feminist curators move forward from the thematic exhibitions about feminism, and look for other ways of working curatorially with feminism, seeking for possibilities of actualising the virtuality and potentiality of feminist politics. Renée Baert writes about feminist curating as a dialogical practice in a similar sense, focusing on how exhibitions gain meaning and reach their potential in relation to each other. Baert’s thinking links here to the aforementioned practice of Helen Molesworth. In her essay, Baert discusses exhibitions and curatorial practices as sites where feminist interventions are produced and reflected upon. Past projects are regarded as beginnings for new projects and practices. The exhibition is seen as a generative site for discussion, negotiation, and action. Here, the notion of contingency is again essential – it is not for the curator to determine how the art will be perceived and reacted upon.⁹⁴ The exhibition is presented as a *generative site* – which I would also call *an affective site for transformation*.

In *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions* (2013) the editors Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry raise questions about what happens when political projects become showcased and historicised in museums. Much in line with Jones’s thought above, Dimitrakaki and Perry express their concerns over feminist politics losing its political and radical edge in the confinements of museum institutions (2013, 1-4). The vast anthology consists of 17

virtual feminist curatorial practices, which would be framed both with art historical and contemporary curatorial references.

⁹⁴ Katrin Kivimaa notes, that in the Baltic countries, Bojana Pejic’s *Gender Check* had exactly this effect of a generative site (2012, 90-95).

essays on the topics of feminism in art institutions, exhibition contexts, as counter practices, as well as curatorial practices. Unlike the editors of *Feminisms is Still Our Name*, Dimitrakaki and Perry do provide a definition of how they understand curating:

In part, this is a product of the prominent role given over to presentation in the strategies of the neo-liberal art world: the focus on temporary (especially popular, 'blockbuster') exhibition as a key means of attracting an audience; the use of biennials, prizes and temporary installations as instruments for the promotion of tourism, urban regeneration and other forms of economic 'growth'; and the shift from the mechanically chronological display to the thematic or monographic exhibition all dramatize the role of the curator in the mediation of art (2013, 10).

The editors thus read curatorial practices through a critique of capitalism. The temporary aspect of exhibitions is seen above all in relation to promotion of tourism and commodification, the temporary exhibition thus being located in a museum. It is clear that Dimitrakaki and Perry have a clearer understanding of the curatorial field than Sjöholm Skrubbe and Hedlin Hayden, who do not acknowledge any specifics of the field. Dimitrakaki and Perry read the emergence of the independent curator as part of the systems of the art market: "Star curators, authors of signature exhibition practices – another effect of the evolution of the neo-liberal museum and its search for constant innovation and dynamism" (2013, 11). Refreshingly, the feminist exhibition is read through a critique of capitalism, alongside unravelling other hierarchical structures of museum institutions. Again, though, the implicit assumption is, that the curating takes place in a museum. The essays in the section 'curating the other/curating as other' discuss curating either in museum and gallery settings, or through thematic discourses, an interview with the Danish collective Kuratorisk Aktion by Dimitrakaki making an exception to this.

In her article from the same year, "Feminism meets the big exhibition: Museum survey shows since 2005" (2013), Hilary Robinson analyses *WACK!* (2007), *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang* (2007), *REBELLE* (2009) and *elles@centrepompidou* (2009-2011) in relation to how feminist politics is written as part of the exhibition concept: how it plays out in the curatorial texts, and in the organisation of the exhibition according to

themes.⁹⁵ Robinson's most critical reading concerns *WACK!*, in which, according to her analysis, the curatorial approach leans more straightforwardly to art historical categories and starting points than to politics of the women's movement or feminist politics (2013, 133-138). Robinson sees particularly *REBELLE* as a successful blockbuster exhibition on feminism, in the sense that the concept managed to spring from feminist aspirations and activism, the institution was known of its feminist aspirations already before the exhibition project, and also, the exhibition didn't present feminism as something belonging to the past, but rather, as an on-going project (2013, 140-143). Here it is the manifestation of feminist politics and activism in the curatorial concept, that defines whether the exhibition itself may be seen as truly feminist. Robinson understand the exhibitions as representations of feminism, and their success is defined accordingly. Any interplay between the artworks or spaces, or the curatorial process beyond the exhibition concept, is not analysed as part of the feminist effect of the exhibitions.

Curating Differently: Feminisms, Exhibitions and Curatorial Spaces (2016), edited by Jessica Sjöholm Skrubbe, is another anthology with a feminist art historical approach. Five out of eight essays have their point of departure either in museum institutions' practices, or in feminist art history. In the introduction, Sjöholm Skrubbe ambiguously defines feminist curating as "a practice of art interpretation and a politics of display" (2016). It is evident, that with this contextualisation, feminist curatorial work cannot be discussed in relation to the current issues of contemporary curating. A refreshingly interesting essay in the book is "Transformative Encounters: Prior and Current Strategies of a Feminist Pioneer", in which researcher and art pedagogue Margareta Gynning presents her practice as an art historian, and as an educational curator and art pedagogue, having worked at Stockholm's Nationalmuseum since 1977. Gynning's practical take on the topic is wonderful and much needed, as she presents her feminist strategies of working with different kinds of museum audiences from children to adults, and employing for

⁹⁵ When the 2nd edition of Robinson's vast publication *Feminism—Art—Theory: An Anthology 1968-2014* came out in 2015, it included an added section "Curating Feminism", with exhibition texts from the aforementioned survey exhibitions *WACK!*, *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang*, and *REBELLE*.

example imitation exercises, in which visitors imitate gestures and facial expressions of paintings, in order to discuss the gender roles presented in them (2016, 79-83).

Katy Deepwell (2006) discusses feminist curatorial strategies and practices since the 1970s in the anthology *New Museum Theory and Practice*. In the article, Deepwell extracts three approaches in feminist curating: historical survey exhibitions on women's art, projects focusing on social and historical analysis in order to contextualise art made by women, and exhibitions focusing on gender identity and the category of femininity. Also here, feminist curatorial work is categorised through examining exhibition concepts and thematics, without any consideration on the actual curatorial processes. The existence of a feminist exhibition can here be detected solely based on the theme it represents.

Whereas *Feminisms is Still Our Name* focuses on the relations of history and contemporaneity of feminist politics, *Politics in a Glass Case* focuses on the deconstruction of institutional power structures. As anthologies, both publications present various voices and points of view. What comes through in this literature though, is that 1) curatorial work on a concept of an exhibition is understood *as* curatorial practice, and 2) an art historical reading of a curatorial concept is presented as a reading of curatorial work. Curatorial practice is seen equal to an art historical process of research and assembling of an exhibition concept, where a clear narrative should be created in terms of history and present. As we have seen in the previous chapter, a curatorial practice cannot be defined through creation of exhibition concepts only. Research is one part of the practice, but there is also the manner in which an exhibition is put together. There are funding issues, there are commissions, there are dialogical practices, discursive practices – there is a whole process behind an exhibition, that cannot be reached through an analysis on curatorial statements or counting the number of represented artists. There is also a certain setting for each exhibition which does not come as a given, neutral space. Principally these essays locate the curator in a museum, without any questions. We can also ask what the exhibition at hand did to a work of art presented in it? Did it

make us think about it in a new way? How did it relate to other works around it? How did it feel to encounter it?

This discussion made me also return to the idea of knowledge production. I asked myself: does working with feminism and art mean, from this perspective, that curatorial practices must disseminate knowledge about feminism, art, feminist art, and/or art made by women? Is this the driving force in feminist curatorial practices? I recognise this approach in some of the retrospective survey exhibitions on feminist art, and particularly in the art historical writing about them. The task of disseminating knowledge about (the history) of feminism and feminist art, is indeed defined in these discussions as the purpose of feminist curating. For example, the exhibition *Global Feminisms* (2007), curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, aspired to showcase contemporary feminist art in a global context. The exhibition focused on feminist art since the 1990s until early 2000s, from a transnational perspective. In a discussion between Cornelia Butler, Amelia Jones and Maura Reilly, regarding the refreshed focus on feminism and feminist art in exhibitions, Reilly states: “Politically driven curatorial practices can be an enactment or performance of theory using artworks in an exhibition space as visual examples” (2010, 40). Reilly refers directly to using art as illustration to political curatorial ambitions, and as a tool for disseminating the curator’s ideas and knowledge. In this light, the whole exhibition becomes a portrait of the curator, supporting the building of canon of curators and a curatorial star cult, but not relating in any way to contemporary political curatorial discourses, emphasizing the work of artists and art’s transformative social powers. With this curatorial approach, the curatorial process diminishes into a process of selection: inclusion and exclusion of art that serves the curator’s pre-established agenda. It becomes a question of selection of works that represent the curator’s thinking in a most suitable manner. At the same time, the curatorial position becomes one of much power. How does this fit in a feminist framework, even if there would be a great number of women artists involved, and connections to the history of feminist politics established? How did the curator think about the role of the artists of the works, that the curator uses as illustrations of their ideas? What were the curator’s thoughts regarding the possible

gain for artists for having their work as part of the project? And how did the curator think about the gain for an individual work of art?

An exception in these anthologies is *Working with Feminism: Curating and exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2012), edited by Katrin Kivimaa. The anthology opens up the art feminist field of former state-socialist countries in Eastern Europe. Half of the writers in the publication are active as curators, continuing work with art, gender and feminism, from where the exhibition *Gender Check* left in 2009. The writers discuss specific curatorial practices, and not only through thematic contents, but rather, through necessities, such as in “Feminist Exhibitions in Poland: From Identity to the Transformation of Visual Order” by Izabela Kowalczyk, “The Power of Queer Curating in Eastern Europe” by Pawel Leszkowicz, and “*Untold Stories: Interview with Rebeka Põldsam and Airi Triisberg*”. What comes through, is that the curatorial practises discussed essentially aim at changing social structures. Also, for example in the discussion between Põldsam and Triis, the exhibition project along with a public programme consisting of screenings, performances and discussions, is discussed in terms of the concept, the institutional circumstances, as well as political and financial possibilities (2012, 202-223).

Looking at literature on feminist exhibitions and feminist curating – what is written on the topic, and from which perspectives – the focus is to a large extent on *curating feminist exhibitions*, and/or *exhibitions presenting women artists’ work*. These shows are most often discussed in museum settings, and from an art historical point of view, the analysis being on how the exhibitions convey certain feminist art historical paradigms. In these books, the writing is done most often by feminist art historians, and most often not by feminist curators. In *Feminisms is Still Our Name*, 8 out of 9 writers are art historians. In *Politics in a Glass Case*, 12 articles out of 17 are written by art historians⁹⁶. In *Working with Feminism*, however, half of the writers are curators. This affects the content of the anthology. Discussing the exhibition *Untold Stories*, an

⁹⁶ I have counted Lucy R. Lippard, Nancy Proctor, Catherine Wood, Helena Reckitt and Suzana Milevska as curators, even though several of them have parallel careers within art history and/or art theory [undoubtedly thanks to the neoliberal pressure to multitask (thank you for this note to Alexandra M. Kokoli)].

international group exhibition focusing on presenting queer art and discussing topics of sexual minorities in Eastern Europe, and held in 2011 at Tallinn Art Hall in the capital of Estonia, one of the three curators of the show, Airi Triisberg, notes that one topic missing from discussions, is the idea of queer/feminist curating as a specific kind of method or a strategy of doing exhibitions differently. Triisberg asks: “For example, how could the notion of queering become operative in the process of exhibition making?” (Pöldsam & Triis 2012, 220). The curators are unable to give straight answers to the question, but the matter remains at the core of their practice.

Angela Dimitrakaki notes, that in the ‘mainstream’ writing on curating, feminist approaches are in the very margins, and most often brought up only in parenthesis (2012b, 25). Similarly, Baert has noted, “feminist practices today are often “folded in” with other issues and positions and may be less visible as such, even as they shape and inform specific contexts (2006, 4). Dimitrakaki continues: “A result of this is, in my view, that feminist curating – and we have seen much of it, from *WACK!* in America to *Gender Check* in Europe – has not managed to articulate a long-term dialogue between feminist positions and radical curatorial theory” (2012b, 25). In the introduction to *Politics in a Glass Case*, Dimitrakaki states again together with Lara Perry, that “there is a rich history of feminist curatorial practice to be examined *as* feminist intervention” (2013, 12; emphasis original). I agree with Dimitrakaki on the fact that there hasn’t been a long-term dialogue between feminist positions and what Dimitrakaki calls radical curatorial theory. However, I do not think that this is solely because of the lack of writing on feminisms and curating, but rather, I argue this is because the existing discourses on feminisms and curating (strong art historical context as a paradigm) and the ones on contemporary curating (no art historical context) do not meet because of their differences. As to the trouble in recognising feminist curatorial interventions, it may be these interventions haven’t been recognised exactly because of the same issue: because they do not necessarily fulfil the requirements set to feminist curatorial practices by feminist art historians. Even if they might be realised through deconstructive and non-hierarchical strategies, they may not be focused on presenting women, nor

declaring a historical relation to feminist politics. This is why the discourses on feminist curating and contemporary curating do not meet.

Reading the material produced during the past decade on feminisms, exhibitions, and partly, curating, the problem that arises for myself, is the relation between feminist history of art and contemporary curating. For me, these are two different approaches, which only rarely meet in a productive manner. My aim in this thesis is not to prove that the art historical approach is the *wrong* one. Exhibitions bringing forth the history of feminist art are still needed, but this shouldn't be defined as the paradigm for feminist exhibitions, nor feminist curating. Rather, what I aim for is providing an alternative to this.

Embodying a feminist curatorial practice

In 2005, five Swedish artists, Line S Karlström, Johanna Gustavsson, Malin Arnell, Anna Linder and Fia-Stina Sandlund, were brought together by art historian Eva Hallin to discuss feminist strategies of resistance, in order for the discussion to be published in the catalogue for the aforementioned travelling exhibition *Konstfeminism/ Art Feminism*. During this meeting the artists, calling themselves the YES! Association / Föreningen JA!, critically discussed the starting points of the then upcoming exhibition, the possible motives of the organisers, as well as the possible pitfalls of the project. Finally, the artists decided to participate in the exhibition by asking the institutions exhibiting the touring exhibition to sign an *Equal Opportunities Agreement*, compiled by the artists, and prove they wanted to practice what they preached and that the act of supporting and hosting the show wasn't mere cosmetics. According to the agreement, the institutions would agree to equal practice in terms of gender and ethnicity (as part of their exhibition programming, and acquisitions and recruitment policies).⁹⁷

⁹⁷ The precisely and eloquently formulated agreement, along with a description of the YES! Association's critique of the cultural climate at the time in Sweden can be found here: <http://www.foreningenja.org/en/2005/10/> (Accessed 27/08/2018).

In the interview with Amundsen and Morland, presented earlier, Simon Sheikh notes that when working explicitly politically, the connection must be made between the political project and the form of the exhibition (2010, 4). I argue, that thinking about YES! Association's act in the context of a feminist blockbuster exhibition marks the difference between working on feminist issues as a thematic, and actually practising feminism. All of the institutions that hosted *Art Feminism*, refused to sign the agreement, though they seemed happy to promote feminist politics, theory and art temporarily.

From a similar point of view, curators Tone Hansen and Maria Lind (2011) have criticized the tendency to merely apply a gender aspect into an art project. Instead, Hansen calls for deeper integration of feminist strategies in institutional practices. According to her, the main question is what museums can learn from feminist strategies and how they can become active in them, rather than learning how to highlight specific (feminist) artworks or artists in a representative manner (2011, 86). Lind also thinks that the attention in institutions should be directed more to *how*, and in what kind of spaces and contexts, artworks are presented instead of merely looking at statistics or trying to show off with singular and often superficial projects dealing with gender (2011, 84). As one solution, Hansen and Lind propose using strategic separatism, meaning that one doesn't have to believe in an essential and natural separation, but rather see it as a situation-bound need to protect oneself from the presence of the mainstream and opposing movement (2011, 87). Strategic separatism may work as a tool for creating space where to act in. This, also, is about putting feminism into practice.

Interestingly enough, the earliest text on feminist curating I have found, has also been the most inspirational one for me during this research process. In her one-page essay "Feminism and Art Curatorial Practice" from 1990, curator Renée Baert strives to pinpoint her take on the relationship between feminist politics and her own curatorial practice. The text has a personal take in it; Baert doesn't make a difference between her life and her curatorial practice. The basis of her thinking is

drawn from how feminism reshapes what we understand in the domain of *knowledge*. For Baert, knowledge is a notion that determines feminist thinking – feminism enables women to be ‘knowing subjects’ against the patriarchal model of the woman as the one who cannot know. Art is here seen as that which stimulates a process of thinking: “The curatorial project is a way of working through certain questions, of learning through a process of researching and writing, in an effort to articulate the particular connections I am in the process making, and extending” (1990).

Further, Baert states: “When I am working, I don’t fully ‘know’ what I’m doing” (1990). Here she turns to the concept of enchantment. The question of feminist curating is for Baert essentially a question of art and politics. She suggests a feminist curatorial practice as *a political practice based on the experience of enchantment*, instead of privileged critical strategies of rupture and negation. As part of the process, the curator focuses on visceral and emotional stresses of works; works that lead one to wonder. The combination of pleasure and contemplation equals the enchantment the curator may mediate. The curatorial practice appears as a feminist interrogation of discourses of knowledge and legitimation, producing collectively other forms of knowledge.

The curatorial practice suggested by Baert relates to feminist politics on several layers: by insisting women have agency as subjects of knowledge. Curating is here seen, indeed, as a process of knowledge production, happening between the curator and the work of art, as well as the work of art and the viewer. The practice itself doesn’t rely on structures that are based on rationality or analytic thinking, but instead create space for other forms of knowledge. To me, Baert is describing a process of thinking through art. I am returning to Baert’s view on feminist curating anew in the concluding chapter of this thesis. I will then reconsider my resistance to the idea of knowledge production, and imagine it anew as a more abstract event of knowledge, a moment in which different elements and beings may come together and form a space for wonder, enchantment and amazement.

The issue 18 of *n.paradoxa* (2006) concentrates on the topic of curatorial strategies. This was the first volume on the topic anticipating the proliferation of literature around feminism, art and curating. The issue remains relevant still today, exactly because of its rare focus on the topic of strategies employed by feminist curators. I found another important text for this thesis in this volume. In the essay “Exhibitionary Affect” Jennifer Fisher drafts a feminist curatorial strategy based on working with the transmission of affect. Focusing on operations of affect, Fisher aims to unravel how exhibitions impact the body and perception in particular ways; in ways that intensify the body and the environment; in ways that open cognition beyond signification; and in ways that make invisible elements explicit (2006, 28). In the essay, Fisher connects work with affect to feminist approaches, emphasizing the significance of embodiment and bodily knowledge, and linking this with the aspect of transformation. I am returning Fisher’s essay in detail in the concluding chapter.

In April 2016, together with feminist researcher Basia Sliwinska, I co-organised a half-day symposium *Feminisms and Curatorial Collaborations* at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. As a reaction to the state of current discussion, I suggested we invite practitioners from the field of visual art and curating as the speakers. We also wanted to focus on the aspect of collaboration in feminist practice, and talk about issues relating to solidarity, friendship, and ethics of care. As speakers, we invited Irene Revell and Lina Dzuverovic, Carla Cruz, Giulia Lamoni and Margarida Brito Alves, and Lucy Stein. What came up as leading thoughts in the presentations, was the cross-pressures of the need for collaborative practice and notions of care, which in a capitalist society exceedingly turn into unpaid forms of affective labour⁹⁸. In addition, art historian Lara Perry was invited to take part in a roundtable discussion concluding the event, as she was one of the organisers of the symposium *Curating in Feminist Thought* in Zurich, having taken place one month after. This symposium, *Curating in Feminist Thought* in Zurich in May 2016, also aimed at taking a discursive curatorial approach as its point of departure. The focus was not on feminist curating as an art historical practice, and also independent and

⁹⁸ I discuss affective labour in more detail in the following chapter.

discursive practices were discussed. Perhaps, it was essential then to contextualise the event precisely in this manner ‘curating *in feminist thought*’, instead of a categorising idea of ‘feminist curating’. According to Elke Krasny, Lara Perry and Dorothee Richter, who were the event organisers and editors of the accompanying issue of *ONCURATING.org*, the aim of the event and the issue was to discuss practice of curating in a more generative role in forming a more inclusive and just art world (2016).

Researcher and curator Elke Krasny is one of the few writers who has discussed feminist curatorial practices outside a definitive art historical background, concentrating more on the practices, methods, and their cultural ramifications (2015; 2016). In the essay “Feminist Thought and Curating: On Method” (2015) Krasny critically examines the relations between curating and feminisms, focusing on gender politics of the field. For Krasny, the dynamics between feminisms and curating have to be reconfigured through acknowledging the origins: feminist thought has emerged as politics, whereas curatorial practice has emerged primarily as a cultural practice. According to Krasny: “Feminist thought provides the methods of analysis in working out how curating is responding to specific historic conditions and how curating does or does not address the social changes brought by feminism within these specific historic conditions” (2015, 56). Krasny discusses the topic through her study on *The International Dinner Party*, a project originally conceived by Suzanne Lacy in the form of a performance as a tribute to Judy Chicago. In the essay “Curatorial Materialism: A Feminist Perspective on Independent and Co-Dependent Curating” Krasny discusses many of the topics I have desperately been seeking in the field: feminist curating as a radical political praxis, independent curatorship, and contemporary case studies. However, also here Krasny discusses only practices explicitly concerned with feminist and gender politics (Lucy Lippard, Ida Biard, VALIE EXPORT, and collectives Red Mind(e)d, and Queering Yerevan). While Krasny’s writing aims to negotiate the feminism in larger social contexts, doing this through a genealogical art historical approach by presenting the practitioners in an art feminist continuum, I argue that Krasny’s writing does not extend the realm of the representational. The feminist politics is always attached

from the start to the thematics of the curatorial practice, and as such, do not favour discussion outside it.

Angela Dimitrakaki has also written about curating and feminist thought outside a strict art historical context, and more in relation to globalisation and critique of capitalism and neoliberal politics (2012; 2013a; 2013b; Dimitrakaki & Perry 2013). In the publication *Gender, artwork and the global imperative: A materialist feminist critique* (2013) the last section of her book, 'Acting on power: critical collectives, curatorial visions and art as life' is dedicated to discussing feminist practices in the context of contemporary curating. In this section, Dimitrakaki presents the work of Why, How & For Whom, Kuratorisk Aktion, Mujeres Publicas, And Malmö Free University for Women, and negotiates the collectives' practices in a larger social context. Dimitrakaki's approach to discuss feminist practices within visual arts and curating is very important, as I have not encountered other writers with as consistent approach to the topic. I argue, though, that through her historical materialist approach, Dimitrakaki's critique remains mainly on how meaning and value is produced in a materialist social context, and not so much on other aspects of curatorial work.

Both Krasny's and Dimitrakaki's work is thus highly valuable to the discourses of contemporary curating and feminist thought, as both of them discuss the topic outside museum institutions, with clear critical and political approaches, and more in touch with the current curatorial discourses. Because of the reasons mentioned above, however, their writing is not useful in my endeavour of drafting a feminist curatorial practice which takes the vibrant materiality of art as its starting point, and employs the notion of affective encounter as the origin of virtual transformation.

Almost contrasting the ideas on curatorial knowledge production, I have become intrigued by Catherine de Zegher's thoughts in relation to curating the exhibition *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of the 20th Century Art in, of, and From the Feminine* (1994-1997). *Inside the Visible* was an international touring exhibition, which was shown at Béguinage of Saint-Elizabeth in Kortrijk, Belgium; the Institute of

Contemporary Art, Boston; National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC; Whitechapel Gallery, London, and The Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth. The exhibition presented works by women artists from three different generations, focusing on three time periods of social or cultural turbulence (1930s, 1970s, 1990s). The exhibition suggested that we could look at artistic production through cyclical shifts, recognising connections and links between the women artists' work from different time periods.

In the exhibition catalogue, de Zegher writes about the significance of exhibitions as events: "An exhibition as an event should be transitory; it should be neither an answer nor a fixed statement but rather a spectrum of activities that offers different perspectives, a set of relationships, a discussion, a dialogue without canon" (de Zegher 1996, 36). What speaks to me in de Zegher's quote is that it suggests that her curatorial approach lies indeed somewhere other than in the theme of the exhibition. De Zegher does not state that she's providing or producing knowledge on feminist art through her curatorial actions and choices, but she does state that she's aiming towards creating a space for encounters, thoughts, emotions and reflections. She later calls this a space for *amazement*: "*Inside the Visible* is conceived within this space of amazement shared by the artwork, the maker, and the beholder—in what may be called 'a participatory relation'" (1996, 36). Reading de Zegher's ideas on exhibitions as spaces for amazement, I understood that this was what I was aiming for—although on a much smaller scale—with my curatorial process with *Only the Lonely* (see ch. 5).

In the curatorial text for *Inside the Visible*, de Zegher also speaks about her relationship with the artworks in the show. Throughout the process, art is seen as a producer of theory, and not the other way around. The exhibition was built upon associations of ideas arising from the artworks (1996, 23). This is precisely what Renée Baert (2000) brings up regarding de Zegher's work with *Inside the Visible*: "The thesis of the exhibition arises from and through the artwork, that is, through its materialities, specialities, haptic properties, iconography, etc. (rather than, as is too often the case, the other way around, ie. art pressed into service to illustrate a pre-established theoretical argument). Thus the exhibition is not a mere 'fastening'

of art and theory but is itself a necessary form” (2000, 8). It is interesting that Baert emphasises the significance of materiality and haptic elements of the works. It is interesting because this is an aspect that is very rarely brought up when discussing feminism and curating. Indeed, it appears that when it comes to discussions on feminist curating, the prevailing approach is along the lines of Maura Reilly’s views discussed previously: the art illustrating a curatorial concept and the curator’s aspirations. The properties and the presence of the artwork remains a secondary topic in relation to the thematic of an exhibition.

It thus seems to me that there exists two paths of thinking governing the field of feminist curating at the moment: an art historical one focusing on the production of so-called *feminist exhibitions*, and a more curatorial approach, where feminist politics is understood as part of the *curatorial practice* itself. One of them attempts to tackle a feminist theme of an exhibition project quite literally and disseminate information about social, cultural and historical circumstances through art; the other one, not often discussed, has possibly a more ambiguous relation to feminist politics, and attempts rather to create an ambiance and a situation in which works of art are contextualised in a feminist theoretical setting. Further on, in the former, the artworks featured in the exhibition project are understood as visual examples reflecting a theoretical and political approach of the curator in the context of the project in question (Butler et al, 2003, 40; see also the subchapter on feminist blockbuster exhibitions). In the latter, the curator wishes to tune into the work and create a setting for it, in which it may, or may not, gain new meanings (de Zegher 1996; Baert 1990, 2000, 2010). I am making this argument based on the discourses presented in the literature above on feminisms and curating. There are, of course, other kinds of feminist curatorial practices out there, collective and individual curatorial practices. As has been mentioned, this thesis is not a mapping the field of feminist curating.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ I have chosen to research only certain selected curatorial approaches more closely, as these have emerged as part of research into curatorial practices concerned with feminisms, new materialisms, affect, and/or emotion specifically.

In Baert's view, feminist curatorial practice is about creating a setting for reflection and enchantment by art. It all starts with the experience, moves through notions of pleasure, and leads to creating a relation with art. I'm interested in the fact that Baert brings up the significance of experience and emotion in relation to feminist curating, and perhaps above all that she sees the *positive* emotions of pleasure and wonder as progressive in this context. This is very similar to de Zegher's later idea of *amazement*. Indeed, in a later text from 2000, Baert comes back to this and writes: "I'd like to try to think feminist curatorial practice as a potential site, a space for speculation, for local contingencies, for new structures of knowledge and pleasure, and, more largely, for poetics. There aren't many models of such a practice around, within feminism or elsewhere, so I would like to give the last word to de Zegher, in appreciation for her conception of the possibilities, and realisation, of the curatorial process as 'a space of amazement' (Baert 2000, 9)."

In this chapter I have discussed current writing on curating and feminist thought, and showed that the main narrative is an art historical one, which does not recognize the idea of curating as a process, and discusses feminist curating solely based on the end product, which, according to this paradigm, should be an exhibition concept which presents a representation of what feminisms and/or feminist art according to feminist art historians is. In the context of this research, the problems are 1) curatorial practice is not acknowledged as what it according to contemporary curatorial discourses is: a discursive practice with art, artists, spaces and audiences; 2) curatorial practice is understood as a praxis inside a museum institution, and there is no space for aspects concerning independent curatorship; 3) the understanding of what feminist exhibitions are, is highly narrow, as feminist exhibition is understood as a representation of an art historical research into feminist art or art made by women.

In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I'm retuning to investigate the connections between Baert's enchantment, de Zegher's amazement, the event of affect, and my own idea of feminist curating as a site for affective transformation. Here I will draft

a proposal on a feminist curatorial practice that operates through encounter, affect, emotion, and transformation. What I need to critically examine further in Baert's and de Zegher's approaches is the political aspect of feminism and how it potentially manifests in the curatorial practice, or the encounter that is set out.

4 Encounters and affects

It all starts with getting in touch with someone or something

If the opposite of being a body is dead [and] there is no life apart from the body... [then] to have a body is to learn to be affected, meaning 'effectuated', moved, put into motion by other entities, humans or nonhumans. If you are not engaged in this learning, you become insensitive, dumb, you drop dead" (Latour 2004, 205; cited in Gregg & Seigworth 2010, 11).

During a conference, philosopher, anthropologist and sociologist Bruno Latour asked the participants to define an antonym to 'a body'. One of the replies which he found most fascinating was 'dead'. Drawing from this reply, Latour describes in the quotation above what he recognises as a need for affective encounters between human and nonhuman entities in order for us to remain alive and awake as sensitive, socially conscious beings. In line with Latour's thinking here, an encounter, as a happening between different bodies and beings, is the most central concept of this thesis, as a starting point for just about everything.

As I point out in the unfolding of this thesis, the notion of an encounter is deeply entangled in the practice of curating, in feminist politics, as well as in the concept of affect. From the point of view of the curator, nothing happens without an encounter with an artwork and/or an artist, from where the encounter may develop into a further acquaintance, discussion, understanding, exchange, relationship, sharing. The encounter is in a sense passed forward, as well as created anew, between the different potential encountering bodies when a work of art is presented to others. In terms of feminist politics, the notion of an encounter is at the very core, as feminist thought and activism is understood through lived and shared embodied experience and the rearrangement of power structures, as these are divided unequally in terms of gender, sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, nationality and ability.

This chapter as a whole discusses the encounter in the context of affect. In this research, I approach and use affect as a tool for understanding and theorizing encounters with artworks, and the transformative processes these encounters (or as I also like to see it, openings or entry points into the lifeworld of a work of art) can give beginnings to. Affect appears as a useful concept for unravelling the complex events and shifts that take shape in these encounters, partly consisting of emotional, associative and other processes that may be difficult, if not impossible, to talk about in terms of language. An encounter is here understood as the required starting point from where the spark of affect may activate, where any process may begin to unfold and evolve. An encounter is understood as essential in the sense that without it, our thoughts, actions, habits, and lives would lead their usual paths. It is the encounters between our bodies and other bodies that are required for things to take on new paths, and for us to transform. It was this rather banal realization about the significance and weight of encounters that lead me to affect theory, hand in hand with thinking about sensations in an encounter that has a power to *touch* and *move* us; an encounter that may cause something to *shift* or *transform* within us.

Touching Feeling, named after Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's book, was a working title for a group exhibition I planned during my first year of PhD studies. Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (2003) was the first source I found into affect theory. While in the end I got more inspired by Kosofsky Sedgwick's style of writing (not least her way of writing herself and her embodied queer experience into critical theory and philosophy), and the way she incorporates the art and the artist Judith Scott as an essential part of her thinking in this essay anthology, than her understanding on affect, *Touching Feeling* turned out to be an entrance for me into affect theory and its relation to art. Reading the book led my thoughts to artists working with tactile materials, a certain kind of non-erotic and soothing sensuality of touch, and the notion of emotional participation. An idea of an exhibition consisting of works by French Chloé Dugit-Gros, British Rosie Farrell and Swedish Linda Persson started to form through these thoughts.

I got to know Chloé Dugit-Gros while visiting Paris and making studio visits with local artists. I was immediately drawn to the use of tactile materials and the sense of play in Dugit-Gros' practice, consisting of video, sculptural and performative work. While many of her works may appear light or “simply” aesthetically pleasing, the works are often grounded in discussing social and political topics, such as living conditions in Parisian suburbs, the French education system, as well as LGBTQIA rights. Discussing her practice and the ideas with the exhibition, Chloé and I decided that her video piece *Narcotica* (2012-2014) would be interesting for the show [fig. 4]. In the video, set in white laboratory-like surroundings, a pair of hands conducts simple ‘magic tricks’ by creating chemical reactions with different materials. When getting in contact with another body of matter, the seemingly passive materialities become alive in their intra-action (Barad 2007). All this activity is depicted calmly and soothingly – highlighting the transformation of the materials.

I got to know Rosie Farrell soon after moving to London in 2013 through a mutual friend. Her work at the time was focused around the theme of magic, which she had worked on at various residencies, and which manifested as a curated programme in Manchester. Through the research, her artistic practice appears as visual extension of a larger exploration she is invested in, in this case magic. In the context of *Touching Feeling*, I was thinking about the careful attention to detail very present in Rosie's practice, alongside meditative processes and movements depicted in several of her works.



[fig. 4] Still images from Chloé Dugit-Gros, *Narcotica* (2012-2014). 11 min, silent.

During our discussions, Rosie and I decided together that the installation *UN-Heaven's Gate* (2012) would be the work for the project [fig. 5]. The piece consists of a video, in which a performer is moving around and with a sculptural metallic structure. The video, shown on a monitor, would have been installed in the space together with the sculpture, alongside a pair of Nike trainers and some violet satin fabric, the elements also appearing in the video. The work is an assemblage consisting of the sculptural work, the other elements, and the interaction of the human and nonhuman bodies presented in the video, the work as a whole presenting itself as a site for potentiality and anticipation. Alongside the topics of human/nonhuman interaction and sensitivity of touch, the work links to Farrell's research on ecstatic dance and rave culture, alongside the topic of losing oneself, or perhaps rather control of oneself, as part of these.¹⁰⁰

Linda Persson is a Swedish artist living and working in London. I've know her practice since a residency period she did in Stockholm, and we continued our



[fig. 5] A still image from Rosie Farrell, *UN-Heaven's Gate*, 2012.

¹⁰⁰ There are also the references to the North American religious cult Heaven's Gate, known primarily of the tragic mass suicide in 1997, in which 39 members of the cult participated. The reference is in the title of the work, as well as in the pair of Nikes and the purple fabric used in the piece, which relate to the uniforms worn by the cult members. This adds another, rather complicated layer to the theme of losing oneself, as well as to touching and feeling.

discussions once I moved to London. In her practice, Persson often focuses on the tactile aspects of materials alongside the histories they carry with them. She has for example worked with clay invested with healing powers in Estonia, sacred stones in The Outback of Australia, and objects related to witchcraft in Sweden. The sensory qualities of materials and objects in a larger sense, play an essential part in her practice as a whole. Thinking about video, installation and sculptural work, I was interested in including a video installation by Persson together with textile works in the exhibition. The textile works were silk scarfs Persson had painted and written on, which were to be installed horizontally with the help of bricks and stones. In the video piece, we see a pair of hands (yes, another work with hands only acting) carefully arranging pieces of coloured plastic on a screen. The work occupies a certain kind of sensuousness, that comes through in the very careful manner the hands are handling the materials in a seemingly arbitrary order.¹⁰¹

My thinking process with *Touching Feeling* was then quite literally focused on the *acts* of touching and feeling, which emerged while discussing the potential exhibition project with Chloé, Rosie and Linda. In the introduction to *Touching Feeling*, Kosofsky Sedwick notes that she chose the title for her essays as a record of “the intuition that a particular intimacy seems to subsist between textures and emotions”. This line resonates strongly with the works I wished to include in the exhibition project. There is much I find highly interesting in Sedgwick’s writing *around* affect, and particularly her aim of deconstructing the Cartesian dualistic thinking model through it. I found notions such as this extremely inspiring in terms of thinking about feminist work with art and curating, and to which I will return to in the concluding chapter of this thesis: “Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself, if only in the making of

¹⁰¹ During our discussions on the exhibition project, Linda and I engaged also in a discussion on affectivity of art and lingering affects, which was published by a Swedish non-profit art space Art Lab Gnesta in their yearly publication *Fält* (no. 5/2014).

the textured object” (2003, 14). Here Sedgwick brings together the tactile materiality of a work of art and the notions of encountering, sensing and feeling deeply connected to it. In retrospect, though, I notice that the direction of the exhibition started evolving more towards what is now known as ASMR (autonomous sensory meridian response). The ASMR phenomenon, existing primarily on communities on YouTube channels and elsewhere on social media, is a term for a relaxing and calming sensation some people experience while hearing certain kinds of sounds or seeing certain kinds of images.¹⁰² Perhaps then, partly because of the undeveloped nature of the exhibition concept and how it was at this phase wandering *around* affect – though mostly because of practical matters – the exhibition never materialised. However, the concept grew into another group exhibition which did materialise in 2015, *Only the Lonely*, which I discuss in detail at the end of chapter five.

By presenting my thinking around affect through encounters with works of art, and the formulation of an exhibition concept, I wish to emphasize the way art has functioned as an essential catalyst in guiding me to different thought forms and fields of theory as part of the research. The curatorial process as a whole is an interplay between works of art, artists, strands of theory, and existing curatorial ambitions – and naturally, the practicality of having or not having a physical setting where a project can materialise. The exhibition concept grew gradually as a process through readings, studio visits, discussions, getting familiar with works of art, as well as artists, and detecting¹⁰³ links between these participants and actors. Alongside touching, it was equally as much the aspect of *feeling* that first attracted me to the

¹⁰² Apparently, there is no scientific explanation to this phenomenon, which is nevertheless experienced by a number of people, its main hub being a YouTube community. As a calming and relaxing sensation felt physically on the body and triggered by sounds and/or images (not so much unlike pornography), ASMR is indeed an interesting phenomenon also when thinking about experiencing art and summoning good feeling, possibly even as a future research for myself. Some (again, non-scientific) sources say experiencing ASMR even effectively help people suffering from insomnia, anxiety, and depression. See e.g. <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-brain-tingling-sounds-of-asmr> (accessed 25 June 2018).

¹⁰³ I wish to use the word 'detect' here, as I do understand intuition and sensitivity towards the qualities and being of an art work as essential part of my work with art and artists.

terrain of affect. Feeling and emotion are topics discussed in feminist theorization both within ontology and epistemology, and at the same time, as notions linking these fields of inquiry. I will not discuss the distinctions between affect, emotion and feeling here anew (see p. 26-27), but will repeat that I do in this thesis approach these terms as non-synonymous, yet at the same time as essentially connected ones.

Most affect theorists, particularly when discussing affect within the philosophical realm (opposed to the biopsychological one¹⁰⁴) make a difference between their use of affect, emotion and feeling. For Deleuze and Guattari, the difference is that feeling and emotion refer to personal sensations, whereas affect doesn't (Massumi 1987, xvi). Here affect is understood more as an *intensity*, which may function, though not necessarily, so that it eventually leads a person to act in a certain way, or even feel certain way. For Massumi, emotion is a term for determinacy while affect is one for indeterminacy (2002, 26). According to Massumi then, emotion and affect follow different logics and function differently from each other. Further explaining Deleuze and Guttari's, as well as Brian Massumi's understanding and use of the terms, Eric Shouse (2005) notes, that in this context feelings are defined as personal and biographical, whereas emotions are defined as social. Through this division, affect can further be understood as *prepersonal*. A feeling is formed in relation to a person's previous experiences, and emotion is the projection or a display of that feeling. An emotion can also vary from being a projection of an inner state, or on the other hand a display adapted to fulfil social expectations (Shouse 2005). As I understand it, *affect itself* exists outside a body, as an intensity which may connect with that body, while it is *the workings of* affect that play out on our bodies, physically and materially, enabling us to act, feel, and connect, among other things.

Referring to what I wrote in the introduction about the “dangers” of focusing on emotion as a feminist researcher, Sara Ahmed emphasizes the need for feminist research to continue unravelling the gendered dichotomies regarding being emotional (women) and rational (men):

¹⁰⁴ Within the psychological realm of affect studies, most researchers do not make this distinction, and find it unsustainable (Leys 2011, 443).

To be emotional is to have one's judgement affected: it is to be reactive rather than active, dependent rather than autonomous. Feminist philosophers have shown us how the subordination of emotions also works to subordinate the feminine and the body (Spelman 1989; Jaggar 1996). Emotions are associated with women, who are represented as 'closer' to nature, ruled by appetite, and less able to transcend the body through thought, will and judgement (2014, 3).

Emotion is not a feminine topic, but rather, a feminist one. Indeed, emotion and reason form one of the central gendered dichotomies, recognised and criticised by feminist scholars (e.g. Jaggar 1996; Ahmed 2014). As Ahmed notes, attending to emotions helps us think about how bodies react to each other – how we orientate towards and away from others. Attending to emotion helps us also to think *what bodies can do* in the Spinozist sense: what *we do* is shaped by the contact we have with others, and emotions in turn shape what *bodies (can) do* (2014, 4).

In discussing the so-called affective turn, feminist film and media scholar Anu Koivunen brings forth feminist theorization on historicization of emotions, conducted for example by Ann Cvetkovich (1992), Lauren Berlant (2008) and Rei Terada (2001). She also points out, that the field of queer studies specifically has contributed to this feminist genealogy of emotion important and influential work focusing on negative emotions, such as studies of trauma cultures, of loss, pain, melancholia, and shame (Koivunen 2010, 20). From the field of feminist research on art and emotion, I'd also like to add *Visualizing feeling: Affect and the feminine avant-garde* (2011) by Susan Best, and *Hold It Against Me. Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013) by Jennifer Doyle to this list. During my research process on affect, I have come across the vast history of feminist research on emotion through references in feminist research literature only (Ahmed 2014; Hemmings 2005, 2012; Koivunen 2010).

The affective turn

In the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010) the editors Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth attempt to grasp the essential points in defining affect: “affect

is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human, nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, *and* in the very passages or variations between these intensities and resonances themselves” (2010, 1). The writers locate affect in the *in-between-ness* of things – relations between humans, nonhumans, objects, things, materials, and other entities – as well as in the potential in these relations, through our capacities to act and be acted upon. According to Gregg and Seigworth, following Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, affect can be defined as a vital force – something other than conscious intention, knowing, or indeed, emotion.

Another aspect Gregg and Seigworth emphasize is how affect is essentially embedded in our being in the world: “affect is persistent proof of a body’s never less than ongoing immersion in and among the world’s obstinacies and rhythms, its refusals as much as its invitations. ...Affect marks a body’s *belonging* to a world of encounters or; a world’s belonging to a body of encounters but also, in *non-belonging*, through all those far sadder (de)compositions of mutual in-compossibilities” (2010, 1-2). Affect is defined as a force guiding our actions, our gravitation towards or away from other bodies and entities, in a continuous flow of invitations and refusals. The oscillation between the affect’s pushes and pulls appears to happen without a conscious will of our own. Gregg and Seigworth – again, following Gilles Deleuze’s theorization of affect on the path guided by Spinoza – recognize the real power of affect as this *potential*: a body’s capacity *to affect* and *be affected* (2010, 2).

Gregg and Seigworth’s use of words and their tendency to circle around the concept rather than directly addressing it, demonstrates the general difficulty in defining affect.¹⁰⁵ As clear definitions of affect are tricky, I am here defining affect by

¹⁰⁵ The writers address this somewhat directly themselves; e.g.: “Because affect emerges out of muddy, unmediated relatedness and not in some dialectical reconciliation of cleanly oppositional elements or primary units, it makes easy compartmentalisms give way to thresholds and tensions, blends and blurs” (Gregg & Seigworth 2010, 4). Clare Hemmings in her turn notes, that affect is much too often accompanied by riddle-like descriptions. In her critical text on the affective turn (2005, 563) she refers poignantly to Massumi’s description of affect “as something scientists can detect the loss of (in the anomaly), social scientists and cultural critics cannot interpret, but philosophers can imagine” (Massumi 2002, 17).

introducing it in a framework of a paradigm shift within cultural and critical studies. A turn to affect in the field of cultural and critical studies is a notion recognised by a number of writers in books, anthologies and articles (Ahmed 2014, 205-211; Gregg & Seigworth 2010; Koivunen 2010; Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003; Leys 2011; Liljeström & Paasonen 2010). In the literature, the turn to affect is most often contextualised as a dissatisfaction fixated on textual and discourse analysis embraced by a poststructuralist approach governing the field of cultural studies.

According to Patricia T. Clough (2007), the affective turn started to take place in the early to mid-1990s by critical theorists and cultural critics, as a reaction to the limitations of poststructuralism and deconstruction governing the field of cultural studies. Clough explains:

In this conceptualization, affect is not only theorized in terms of the human body. Affect is also theorized in relation to the technologies that are allowing us both to “see” affect and to produce affective bodily capacities beyond the body’s organic-physiological constraints. The technoscientific experimentation with affect not only traverses the opposition of the organic and the nonorganic; it also inserts the technical into felt vitality, the felt aliveness given in the pre-individual bodily capacities to act, to engage, to connect—to affect and be affected. The affective turn, therefore, expresses a new configuration of bodies, technology and matter that is instigating a shift in thought in critical theory” (Clough 2007, 2).

Clough brings forth three key elements in the turn to affect, which have also heavily impacted the starting points of this research: 1) affect is theorized outside the human body; 2) talking about affective relations enables us to talk about relations between organic and nonorganic matter, as well as human and nonhuman entities; and 3) talking about affect allows us to focus on the significance of felt vitality in our capacities to act, engage and connect. According to Clough, the turn to affect proposed a substantive shift in that it returned critical theory and cultural criticism to embodiment, materiality and bodily matter – which had been since then treated in terms of various constructionisms under the influence of poststructuralism and deconstruction (2010, 206). However, several feminist researchers such as Sara Ahmed (2014), Anu Koivunen (2010) and Clare Hemmings (2005, 2012) have reminded that embodiment, materiality and bodily matter have not at all been forgotten, but that these topics have been present at the heart of feminist inquiry

since the 1970s. Speaking particularly about the feminist field of affect studies, Marianne Liljeström and Susanna Paasonen note, that considerations of affect foreground questions of matter, biology and energetic forces (2010, 1). As the editors of an anthology focused on feminist affective readings, their approach has been to not oppose considerations of materiality, affect and embodiment to textual analysis, but rather investigate their interrelations as intimate co-dependence (2010, 2). I have found this to be the case particularly in the field of feminist studies in new materialist theory and focus on agency of matter, discussed widely in publications such as *Material feminisms* (2008), *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' through the Arts* (2013), *Carnal Aesthetics: Transgressive Imagery and Feminist Politics* (2013), as well as *Anthropocene Feminism* (2017). All of these anthologies include at least one article focused on affect as a tool for unfolding questions relating to matter and our entanglements with matters human and nonhuman. I will return to the linkages between feminist inquiry, affect, embodiment, and new materialism in detail in the second part of this chapter.

According to Clough, the affective turn opens up a transdisciplinary approach to theory and method from the point of view of changes in the social deployment of affective capacity (2007, 3). Clough points to the use (and usefulness) of the concept of affect as a tool for studying phenomena overarching and connecting the fields of the cultural, the political, and the economic. The vastness and variety of fields of study employing affect studies is an indication of the transdisciplinary nature of affect studies. It relates essentially also to why I have selected a certain path of affect studies over others in relation to my research material and questions.

In the introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, Gregg and Seigworth emphasize there is no single, generalizable theory of affect (2010, 3). However, according to them, contemporary affect theory is deeply influenced by two essays featuring two different approaches to affect, that were both published in 1995: Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank's 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold' and Brian Massumi's 'The Autonomy of Affect'. Indeed, the two main branches of inquiry within affect theory are most often defined between the followers of on the one hand

psychologist Silvan Tomkins (Kosofsky Sedgwick and Frank's essay), and on the other, philosophers Gilles Deleuze alongside Felix Guattari, their thoughts originally rooted in the philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (Massumi's essay).¹⁰⁶ I'm first introducing the former approach mainly through the thinking of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick.¹⁰⁷

The biopsychological branch

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's writing is rooted in the development of gender studies and queer studies in the early 1990s. Being simultaneously analytic, deconstructive and poetic, her writing is brought to life through lived experience of love, loss, and in the end, also illness. For example, in *Touching Feeling* (2003) her research and writing unfolds as a lifelong project, bringing together essays interrogating topics concerning emotion, expression, performativity and affect through the work of thinkers (J.L. Austin, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Silvan Tomkins) she has been contemplating throughout her career.¹⁰⁸

In terms of conceptualising affect then, Kosofsky Sedgwick relies on psychologist Silvan Tomkins's psychobiology of differential affects (1962). According to Tomkins and his followers, there exists a limited number of affects, as a system resembling the elements of a periodic table. The combinations of these affects work "to produce what are normally thought of as emotions, which, like the physical substances formed from the elements, are theoretically unlimited in number" (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003, 18n). Importantly to Tomkins, affects appear as an autonomous system connected to the body and other bodies. As Kosofsky

¹⁰⁶ This distinction has been made also by others, e.g. Koivunen 2010; Leys 2011.

¹⁰⁷ In the end, I didn't feel the need to close-read Silvan Tomkins' psychological texts, as the second-hand references gave me enough information on the direction of Tomkins' thinking around affect. It can also be stated here that in the literature on affect, Tomkins' thinking is most often introduced through Sedgwick and Frank's 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold' (1995), in the manner mentioned above also by Gregg and Seigworth (2010, 5-6).

¹⁰⁸ According to Sedgwick, obsession is the most durable form of intellectual capital (2003, 4).

Sedgwick explains, “affects can be, and are, attached to things, people, ideas, sensations, relations, activities, ambitions, institutions, and any number of other things, including other affects. Thus, one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy” (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003, 19).

Marking a distinction to Freud’s drives as the main motivator of human behaviour, Kosofsky Sedgwick defines Tomkins’ affect system as a different kind of a structure: “For Tomkins, the difference between the drive system and the affect system is not that one is more rooted in the body than the other; he understands both to be thoroughly embodied, as well as more or less intensively interwoven with cognitive processes. The difference instead is between more specific and more general, more and less constrained: between biologically based systems that are less and more capable of generating complexity or degrees of freedom” (2003, 18). The autonomous system of affects is something else than Freudian drives – affects do not function in terms of structuring a means to an end.¹⁰⁹

Affects exist as an autonomous yet measurable system linked to the body, while embodying a certain kind of freedom of connecting to other bodies and other affects. As Koivunen puts it, for Tomkins “affect is a biopsychological notion based on empirical studies and defined as distinct from the psychoanalytic logic of drives. His model features nine discrete human affects that have distinct neurological profiles and measurable psychological responses” (2010, 10). For Sedgwick, the realm of affects opens up a conceptual realm where we can attend to psychology and materiality outside the dualities of subject versus object or of means versus ends (2003, 21). As I read it, it is above all this freedom of affects, which enables the escape from a dualistic model of understanding the world, that Kosofsky Sedgwick is drawn to.

¹⁰⁹ To a certain extent, not being overly familiar with the psychoanalytic discourses, the discussion on affect appears to me here perhaps more as a discussion within the field of psychology as a way of taking distance from a prevailing Freudian perspective.

Feminist philosopher and social theorist Teresa Brennan's book *The Transmission of Affect* (2004) opens up with the often-cited line within affect studies: "Is there anyone who has not, at least once, walked into a room and 'felt the atmosphere?'" (2004, 1). The line is interesting, as it does capture several essential notions in affect theory: the significance of feeling; the relational existence of bodies and entities; the possibility to affect and be affected; and perhaps most importantly in terms of this thesis, the acknowledgement that a nonhuman entity (such as a room), may embody an atmosphere which actively affects other bodies within it.

Though partly writing about ethereal topics, such as an atmosphere of a room, and the *transmission* of affect alongside its relationality, Brennan writes about affect from a Tomkins-related empirically measurable biopsychological point of view. According to Brennan, the transmission of affect is social or psychological in origin, though simultaneously, the transmission is responsible for changes which can be detected on the body. The effects of affect are then biological and physical: "some are brief changes, as in a whiff of the room's atmosphere, some longer lasting" (2004, 3). According to Brennan, affects have the ability and the power to alter the biochemistry and neurology of a subject. Sara Ahmed (2010, 36) notes, that Brennan's example of walking into a room and feeling the atmosphere follows the 'outside in' model, where the subject appears as a receiver of various affects entering the autonomous system – in this case, the atmosphere "getting into the individual". Ahmed notes however, that the way we enter into a space also affects what impressions we perceive. For example, entering a room while anxious, affects the way we read other people's gestures and words, and indeed also how we read the atmosphere of the room. The anxiousness might even affect the general mood of what the room felt before the entrance.¹¹⁰

¹¹⁰ A slightly different, yet in my reading in line with the "Tomkinsian" approach to affect is provided by researcher Lisa Blackman, who has written on affect and embodiment in her book *Immaterial Bodies: Affect, Embodiment, Mediation* (2012). Writing from the point of view of social studies, Blackman focuses on the topic primarily through a notion of subjectivity, engaging in dialogue both with psychology and neuroscience. As part of her study, Blackman discusses intriguing phenomena essentially connected with e.g. the topic of intuition, such as voice hearing and telepathy, but even if these are highly fascinating as topics, Blackman's approach to affect in its framework of sociology, psychology and

Reading Brennan, I found it interesting that she does not identify as “a Tomkinsian” nor mention him as a reference. In addition, she doesn’t acknowledge the Deleuzian branch of affect studies either. According to Brennan, “present definitions of the affects or emotions stem mainly from Darwin’s physiological account of the emotions and something called the William James-Carl Lange theory” (2004, 4). The two main branches of affect studies are not acknowledged here at all, which I assume can be explained through the cross-disciplinary nature of affect studies. Brennan’s references are rooted in the branch of affect studies deriving from biology, neuroscience and psychology, but not from humanities. As the previous quote presents, Brennan doesn’t make a clear distinction between affect and emotion either. In her view, it is bodily responses that give rise to affective states, which again are recognised as taxonomies of emotion. Affect stands for “the physiological shift accompanying judgement”, yet it is “basically synonymous” with emotion (Brennan 2004, 5-6; noted in Koivunen 2010, 10).

Psychologist Ruth Leys, who approaches the turn to affect from a critical point of view (2011), sees that for Tomkins and his followers, affective processes occur independently of intention or meaning: “According to that paradigm, our basic emotions do not involve cognitions or beliefs about the objects in our world. ... In contrast to Freud and ‘appraisal theorists’, for whom emotions are embodied, intentional states governed by our beliefs, cognitions and desires, Tomkins and his followers interpret the affects as nonintentional, bodily reactions” (2011, 437). According to Leys, this view on the relations between affect, emotion and intention is simply not sustainable or valid in the light of studies in psychology. The main criticism Leys has toward Tomkins’ and his followers’ thinking then, is the idea that even though affects can and do combine with the cognitive processing systems of the brain, they are seen as essentially separate from those. According to Leys, affects cannot be defined and understood in biological terms.

neuroscience is far from the Deleuze-Guattarian approach, which I argue, is more suitable when thinking about art. Further discussion on this below.

Reading into Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Teresa Brennan's writings on affect, I soon realised that the idea of affect as a reaction understood primarily through studies in psychology and neuroscience was not what I was looking for, while searching for a tool kit to think about feminism, art and curating. I was not looking for a set of affects as psychological concepts, but rather, I saw affect as an energy related to art. As I understand it, Kosofsky Sedgwick, Brennan, and others see Tomkins' system of affects as a useful tool for examining materialities of emotion and feeling within a psychological context, but simultaneously outside a Freudian model of thinking, as well as the Cartesian dualistic model of thinking through binaries. The inevitable connection between affect and emotion is there, and both Sedgwick and Brennan clearly recognise the energetic dimension and potential affects have. As Brennan puts it: "All this means, indeed the transmission of affect means, that we are not self-contained in terms of our energies. There is no secure distinction between the 'individual' and the 'environment'" (2004, 6). According to Brennan, this explains how affects can enhance or deplete what we are feeling. Nevertheless, thinking about affect as a scientific object of study (seeing it primarily in relation to a determined set of emotion-affects, measuring it, and testing it through empirical experiments) isn't a fruitful approach with regards to my research questions and its aims. The other main branch of affect theory proved to offer more generous starting points to think about the relations between art, curating, and feminist thought.

The Deleuzian branch

Watch me: affection is the intensity of colour in a sunset on a dry and cold autumn evening. Kiss me: affect is that indescribable moment before the registration of the audible, visual, and tactile transformations produced in reaction to a certain situation, event, or thing. Run away from me: affected are the bodies of spectres when their space is disturbed (Colman 2010, 11).

Differing from the scientific and psychological (and perhaps, simultaneously more straightforward and measurable) understanding of affect embraced by the followers of Silvan Tomkins, the poetic quote above by feminist new materialist theorist

Felicity Colman describes beautifully the Deleuzian theorization of affect. The notion of affect is approached above all as an *intensity*, a *force*, an *energy* or a *potential*, and theorized through relational dynamics between entities. The quote by Colman brings up also the main aspects of affect in Deleuzian readings: the difference between affection and affect, and the two-sided nature of affect both to affect, and to be affected.¹¹¹

According to Michael Hardt, Spinoza's work is the source, either directly or indirectly, of most of the contemporary work in the field of affect today, through his theorisation of the mind's ability to think parallel to the body's ability to act (Hardt 2007, ix). According to Spinoza, we exist in a constant ebb and flow of series of affects (for example joy or sadness) coming towards us in the form of other bodies, which in their turn contribute to our capacity of being affected. Affects based on joy increase our power to act, while sadness diminishes it. It is bodies external to ours, that determine the ebb and flow of these affects and thus, our capacity to act (Deleuze 1988, 50). According to Spinoza, mind and body are autonomous, but proceed to develop in parallel. Through affect then, we constantly pose questions about the relationship between the mind and the body, assuming that their powers constantly correspond in some way (Hardt 2007, x). Indeed, it is from Spinoza that Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari together, take the idea of a correspondence between the power to act and the power to be affected. As Hardt puts it: "[the power to act and the power to be affected] applies equally to the mind and the body: the mind's power to think corresponds to its receptivity to external ideas; and the body's power to act corresponds to its sensitivity to other bodies. The greater our power to be affected, [Spinoza] posits, the greater our power to act" (2007, x).

¹¹¹ It might be added, that in its use of language, Colman's poetic quote embodies also the certain kind of mysteriousness of the Deleuzian view on affect, which is perhaps simultaneously a great possibility (the openness of interpretation and the possibilities of adaptation depending on the context) and a danger (of falling into the poetry and the overall "fluffiness" – and thus, again the openness to interpretation and adaptation to one's needs depending on the context).

In the notes for the translation of *A Thousand Plateaus* Brian Massumi explains Deleuze and Guattari's use of the word affect through Spinoza's concepts:

AFFECT/AFFECTION. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state of the body to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and a second, affecting, body (with body taken in its broadest possible sense to include "mental" or ideal bodies) (Massumi 1987, xvi).

Massumi points out the relational aspect of affect: again, the ability to affect and be affected. Here we can see the Spinozist ebb and flow of power in relation to actions: "To every relation of movement and rest, speed and slowness grouping together an infinity of parts, there corresponds a degree of power. To the relations composing, decomposing, or modifying an individual there correspond intensities that affect it, augmenting or diminishing its power to act; these intensities come from external parts or from the individual's own parts. Affects are becomings" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, 256). According to Colman (2010) the Deleuzian sense of affect can be distinguished as a philosophical concept that indicates the result of the interaction of bodies. Defining affect as an intensity, Deleuze extends Spinoza's and Nietzsche's philosophical conceptions of affect in order to describe the processes of becoming, understood as transformation through movement and over duration (2010, 12). The Deleuzian concepts of affect and becoming are deeply embedded in ideas of both transformation and having power to act.

In *A Thousand Plateaus*, Deleuze and Guattari write about affect also in relation to Spinoza's central question: *what can a body do?* (1987, 256). This question inhabits in itself an aspect of possibility and potentiality, a 'not yet', which may well actualise, or on the other hand, cease to do so.¹¹² According to Deleuze and Guattari, "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more

¹¹² Noted also by Ahmed (2010); Gregg & Seigworth (2010).

powerful body” (1987, 257). Again, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize a body’s ability to affect other bodies, and its ability to be affected by other bodies. Importantly, what comes forth here is the *contingency* that affect embodies; we cannot be sure what the outcome of an affective exchange is, but we can be sure an exchange will take place. As Gregg and Seigworth note: “... there are no ultimate or final guarantees – political, ethical, aesthetic, pedagogic, and otherwise – that capacities to affect and to be affected will yield an actualized next or new that is somehow better than “now” (2010, 9-10).” Affect is above all an open-ended *potential*, a *dynamics*, a *force*, and an *intensity*.

According to Colman (2010, 12), Deleuze’s perception of affect does have to do with emotion and feeling, though emotion is here understood outside subjective experience or perception. Just as a Deleuzian becoming is understood as a force acting outside the individual and their life experiences, extending to matters happening in the world, affect can produce a sensory or abstract result and is physically and temporally produced. As Colman points out, reaction is a vital part of the Deleuzian concept of affective change, which can be understood as the becoming. In Colman’s words: “Affect expresses the modification of experiences as independent things of existence, when one produces or recognises the consequences of movement and time for (corporeal, spiritual, animal, mineral, vegetable, and/or conceptual) bodies. Affect is an experiential force or a power source, which, through encounters and mixes with other bodies (organic or inorganic), the affect becomes enveloped by affection, becoming an idea, and as such, Deleuze describes, it can compel systems of knowledge, history, memory, and circuits of power” (Colman 2010, 12).

Social theorist and philosopher Brian Massumi has continued on the path led by Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, in his own work on affect (1995; 2002; 2015). In his article ‘Autonomy of affect’ (1995), Massumi defines affect as presocial intensity or tendency. In *Parables for the virtual* (2002), affect is further defined in terms of bodily and autonomic responses, which point to a “visceral perception” preceding perception. Massumi thinks about affect in terms of virtual and emergent

tendencies, leaning into the realm of potentiality. According to Clough, for Massumi the turn to affect is about opening the body to its indeterminacy, and the indeterminacy of autonomic bodily responses. This is why Massumi defines affect in terms of its autonomy from conscious perception and language, as well as emotion (Clough 2010, 209).

In a later book, *The Politics of Affect* (2015), Massumi continues to fill in gaps and responding to criticism, defining affect anew as autonomic, yet essentially collective and deeply relational (2015, 205). Here Massumi's focus is more on the political and transformational aspect of affect and its workings. Affect is understood as a dimension of life, as *intensities of feeling* that fill life, and which directly carry a *political* valence. According to him, affect can only be understood as enacted (2015, vii). It is the Spinozist "not yet", which echoes also in Massumi's understanding of the world as an ongoing process in continual transformation, in addition to Deleuze and Guattari following thinkers such as Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead.

What affect primarily is to Massumi, is change, possibility, and hope.¹¹³ The workings of affect can be detected in feelings of the *change in capacity*, and it is this that highlights the political dimension of affect. The intensity of an encounter or an event refers to an augmentation in powers of existence – our capacities to feel, act and perceive – that occurs through this encounter or event. To enable this to happen and to be part of the transformation, we need to be willing and open to take risks:

To affect and to be affected is to be open to the world, to be active in it and to be patient for its return activity. This openness is also taken as primary. It is the cutting edge of change. It is through it that things-in-the-making cut their transformational teeth. One always affects and is affected in encounters; which is to say, through events. To begin affectively in change is to begin in relation, and to begin in relation is to begin in the event (Massumi 2015, ix).

Sara Ahmed has written about "the promise of affect" (2010; 2014), which may be thought of as hope and potentiality mentioned above by Massumi. Potentiality of

¹¹³ Hope, in terms of potential, potentiality and becoming attached to the concept of affect, is present also in Sara Ahmed's theorization of affect and the Spinozist 'not yet' (2010; 2014).

constant motion and movement of becoming is something that essentially describes the concept of affect. This idea of affect's existence as a virtuality, as a promise or potentiality of a shift, a change, or a transformation that may well take place, exists parallel to the idea of affect as something that is felt physically and concretely in and on the body (O'Sullivan 2001; Hemmings 2005, 550). There is a chance for something to happen, that may well transform us, but at the same time, whether it actually does, is out of our hands.

According to Gregg and Seigworth (2010, 6) we can differentiate the two main lines of affect studies in terms the directionality of affect: with Tomkins affect is the prime motivator that comes to put the movement in bodily drives, whereas with Deleuze affect is seen as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman. While these two branches of affect theory are the ones that are most often brought up while defining affect and theorizing it, it feels important to emphasize that affect shouldn't be seen through this divide alone, but rather, through the idea that there is a variety of definitions of affect and contexts for discussing it.

Gregg and Seigworth describe eight different takes on affect's theorization linking both to Tomkins' legacy and/or Deleuze's legacy, with slight variations regarding how the writers approach the relations between the ability to affect and the ability to be affected. A variety of practices from the fields of philosophy, neurosciences, humanist studies, cultural studies, visual culture studies, psychological and psychoanalytic inquiry as well as feminist and queer activism are brought into the field of affect studies. Affect is part of inquiries into interlaced human/nonhuman relations within phenomenologies of embodiment; research on the human/machine/inorganic within cybernetics and neurosciences; non-Cartesian traditions in philosophy; certain lines of psychological and psychoanalytic inquiry; politically engaged work by feminist and queer theorists focusing on collective embodied experience; cultural theory criticizing the linguistic turn; critical discourses of emotions and histories of emotion; as well as science focused on pluralist approaches to materialism (2010, 6-9). The brief mapping shows, that affect studies

is all about looking for means of inquiry “to account for the *relational capacities that belong to the doings of bodies* or are conjured by the *world-belongingness that gives rise to a body’s doing*” (2010, 9, my italics). Viewed like this, it appears needless to look for one solid definition to what affect is or what affect theory is. When it comes to definitions, affect appears to at least need a context in order to receive a meaningful definition.

But is it a turn? – a feminist reading of the turn to affect

One could also argue that affective turn never happened. For the issue of affect did not emerge from nowhere to feminist and other critical scholarship” (Koivunen 2010, 22).

The turn to affect has not taken place without criticism. Even if deeply entangled in writing about affect herself, for example Clare Hemmings criticises the mysticism that is attached to the concept of affect (2005, 563). Patricia Clough is on a similar path, as she sees severe issues particularly with studies on emotion and feeling. According to Clough, in these studies affect comes to be about a subjective reflection and an individual’s subjective unconsciousness (2010, 206-207). Clough’s criticism must be examined closer, as to me it entails a longing for an ideal of objectivity, and simultaneously, a dismissal of embodied knowledge having (scholarly) significance. Clough does not specify studies she finds guilty of this. I am below unravelling Clough’s criticism with the help from Sara Ahmed.

In her article ‘The Turn to Affect: A Critique’ (2011) Ruth Leys discusses critically the general turn to affect, and particularly the turn to the neurosciences of emotion. The central problem to Leys, who reads affect studies from the point of view of psychology and neuroscience, is the distinction most affect theorists make between affect and emotion (Deleuze 1988; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; 1994; Massumi 2002; 2015). According to Leys, scientifically speaking this distinction cannot be sustained. Leys detects also a connection that fundamentally binds together the new affect theorists and neuroscientists: their shared anti-intentionalism (2011, 443). In both of

the main strands, the system of affects is seen as independent or autonomous. According to Leys, this autonomy leads automatically to understanding the affect system as lacking any signification and meaning. As we have seen above, however, this is not automatically the case. As theorized by Deleuze and Guattari, and Massumi, affect clearly has a connection to politics, change and transformation through its ability to augment or diminish a body's capacity to act and relate to other bodies. These are notions that hold heavy signification and meaning. When theorizing affect as an intensity or a force which may lead to the actualisation of an encounter, an action, or an emotion, there perhaps is no ethical value to affect itself. However, the effects or consequences of *workings of affect* instead do carry ethical and political value. When understood in the Deleuzian sense, affect is an apparatus or a vehicle, a force, a tendency and an intensity, that exists in between bodies and things, creating a state of becoming and potential. Thus, affect itself holds no value or judgement, but when we start thinking about where the workings of affect may lead, it's another thing.

What is most relevant in the framework of this thesis though, is the feminist critique of the turn to affect. Feminist film and media scholar Anu Koivunen notes: "To talk about an affective turn in the singular is to imply a shared agenda and sense of direction that does not do justice to the diversified field of feminists 'working with affect'" (2010, 9). Indeed, looking at contemporary writing on affect – for example by Clough and Massumi above – one can notice there is little, if any consideration to feminist research on affect and emotion. In fact, according to Ahmed (2014, 206), feminist theorization of emotion has disappeared from the genealogy of the affective turn, as it is translated from 'an affective turn' to 'turn to affect', indicating a turn away from emotion, which feminist research is deeply involved in. I have above used the terms 'an affective turn' and 'a turn to affect' parallel to each other, in order to emphasize that in this research, I do not wish to make this distinction nor to turn away from emotion.

In the foreword to *The Affective Turn* (2007), political theorist Michael Hardt names feminist theory focused on the body, and queer theory focused on politics of

emotion as the two main precursors to the turn to affect in the United States (2007, ix). The sources Hardt refers to in the notes are more specifically Judith Butler's *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (1993) and Elizabeth Grosz's *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (1994) from the field of feminist theory, and *Shame and its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader* (1995) edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, as well as *Intimacy* (2000) and *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (2004), both edited by Lauren Berlant. In the foreword Hardt describes the turn to affect: "The perspective of the affects forces us to focus on the problematic correspondences that extend its two primary divides – between the mind and body, and between reason and the passions – and how the new ontology of the human it reveals has direct implications for politics" (2007, xii).

In the afterword of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Ahmed (2014, 206) refers to Hardt's preface and his remark in it, according to which focus on affect "certainly does draw attention to the body and emotions, but it also introduces an important shift" (Hardt 2007, ix). According to Ahmed, what Hardt suggests here – though not completely explicitly – is that "the turn to affect requires a different 'synthesis' than the study of the body and emotions, because affects 'refer equally to the body and mind' and because they 'involve both reason and passions'" (Ahmed 2014, 206; Hardt quoted above). Indeed, Hardt may present feminist research and queer studies as *precursors* to the more recent work on affect, but simultaneously, he wants to make a clear difference between these lines of inquiry. In Hardt's view, the turn to affect must be defined primarily in Deleuze's Spinozist terms. It is only within this theorisation, that we can talk about the relations between mind and body. Ahmed continues: "When the affective turn becomes a turn to affect, feminist and queer work are no longer positioned as part of that turn. Even if they are acknowledged as precursors, a shift *to* affect signals a shift *from* this body of work" (2014, 206). It is in fact striking to which extent feminist research on affect, emotion and embodiment has been cast out from current "mainstream" affect theory. Ahmed states: "We need to be explicit here: when the affective turn is translated into a turn to affect, male authors are given the status of originators of this turn.

This is a very familiar and very clear example of how sexism works in or as citational practice” (2014, 230n).

In her article ‘An affective turn?’ (2010) Koivunen discusses the turn to affect in the framework of feminist theory. According to her, the affective turn is fuelled by a desire to renegotiate the critical currency of feminist thought, by investigating and conceptualizing the subject of feminism as embodied, located and relational (2010, 9). At the end of the essay, Koivunen asks whether we can say that there actually has been a turn at all. Referring to feminist inquiry into phenomenology, anthropology, sociology, psychology, epistemology, as well as feminist methodology in general from the 1970s onward, Koivunen points out that “the question of affect and the reflexive link between ontology and epistemology were always already there in feminist self-consciousness” (2010, 23). As preceding models, she brings forth the feminist tradition of consciousness-raising, as well as feminist standpoint epistemology and its call for situated knowledges. Also Clare Hemmings stresses the significance of intersubjectivity and relationality, as well as valuing different modes of knowing which prioritise dialogue and collectivity, as essential parts of feminist research: “One of the primary modes through which feminist theory has made its mark has been through its challenge to knowledge as objective, and through a focus on the importance of being as a mode of knowing. Feminist theory has always been concerned with the question of the relationship between ontology and epistemology, and has privileged affect as a marker of their intertwined relationship. ... Such work highlights the importance of feeling for others as a way of transforming ourselves and the world, and thus renders affect as a way of moving across ontology and epistemology” (2012, 148).

Hemmings, Ahmed, and Koivunen all criticize the manner in which the turn to affect is theorized outside the apparent involvement and, indeed, advancement within feminist theory. Further, Hemmings begins her article ‘Invoking affect: Cultural theory and the ontological turn’ (2005) with strong criticism of affect theorists, mainly Kosofsky Sedgwick and Massumi, particularly in terms of their attitude towards poststructuralist theory. Hemmings is provoked by what she sees as

Kosofsky Sedgwick and Massumi presenting affect as a solution to the problems of poststructuralism: “affective rewriting flattens out poststructuralist inquiry by ignoring the counter-hegemonic contributions of postcolonial and feminist theorists, only thereby positioning affect as ‘the answer’ to contemporary problems of cultural theory” (2005, 548).

According to Hemmings, neither Sedgwick or Massumi argue clearly enough their sources for the criticism, as the problems of poststructuralism are seen to a large extent as an unnamed enemy, which poses too much emphasis on linguistic models and overrides the significance of the lived body (2005, 556). Hemmings brings up also the vast range of epistemological work that attends to emotional investments, political connectivity and the possibility of change. As an example, Hemmings poses feminist standpoint epistemology, which provably constitutes an established body of inquiry into the relationship *between* the ontological, the epistemological and the transformative. Ahmed in her turn notes that “feminist work on bodies and emotions *challenged from the outset* mind-body dualisms, as well as the distinction between reason and passion” (2014, 206). Indeed, what Hemmings and Ahmed show, is that feminist standpoint epistemology and postcolonial theory (e.g. Harding 1986; Haraway 1991; Braidotti 1994, Hill Collins 2000), as well as feminist work on emotion (e.g. Jaggar 1996; hooks 1989, Lorde 1984) are actually doing what both Kosofsky Sedgwick and Massumi claim poststructuralist theory is not doing. In feminist epistemology, the embodied experience has always been understood as embedded in the forming of knowledge, in a way that epistemology and ontology have never been separated or opposed (Hemmings 2005, 557-558; Ahmed 2014, 206).

Hemmings acknowledges also the benefits affect as a concept has to feminist studies, in relation to poststructuralist views. One problem is that deconstructivist theory does not take into consideration the residue that is not socially constructed, which nevertheless constitutes the fabric of our being. Second, affect theorists acknowledge that the social world escapes both the quantitative empirical approaches and textual analysis which poststructuralist research relies on; affect is

offered as a key to deepen our vision of the terrain we are studying, prioritising our qualitative experience of the world as an embodied experience that has the capacity to transform us. And third, affect theorists question oppositional and dualistic models of thinking in fully accounting for a political process; affect allows us to understand subject formation alternatively, emphasizing relational modes over oppositional ones (Hemmings 2005, 549-550).

Thinking about feminism through aspects of *solidarity* and *recognition* of sameness and difference, essential aspects of affect can in turn be recognized as essential aspects of feminist politics. I find Hemmings' writing on affect extremely useful, partly because of her heavy and revealing criticism on the affective turn – its genealogy and how it's theoretically contextualised in much of the research. However, despite this, she relies on affect as a useful tool in radical feminist work and research, downplaying the alleged shift by enhancing the significance of feminist research on emotion and embodiment as an essential part of current theorising of affect. Hemmings' criticism concerns 'the turn' itself, which diminishes the history of feminist research, as well as the significance of deconstructive poststructuralist writing on sexual difference and embodiment (2005, 548).

Much in line with Hemmings' criticism of the genealogy of contemporary affect theory, I see the genealogical inclusion of feminist research as an essential part of theorization of affect, and also of how I'm approaching the concept within this research; I see affect as a fruitful tool for thinking about feminist strategies in curating contemporary art, and negotiating what feminist curatorial work with art, artists and spaces could mean today. Affect functions here as a useful tool in discussing a process of summoning energies as part of presenting contemporary art – which again, I offer as a model for feminist curatorial practice. With affect, I see a huge potential above all in the aspect of change and transformation it entails, as discussed above.

Transformation

If nineteenth-century culture constructed the distinction between the personal and the political, then the contemporary claim that the personal is political does not mean that the personal as it currently exists is political. Rather, the political agenda must consist in realigning the relations between the private and public spheres, or in transforming the institutions that construct private life or personal experience as separate from public life. Often the personal is political precisely because it is constructed as not being political, and that separation cannot be wished away by an act of consciousness or analysis; it can only be altered by material and social transformation. Otherwise, practices designed to repoliticize the personal, such as consciousness-raising groups, remain only a symptom of the separation of public and private spheres, not a cure” (Cvetkovich 1992, 3).

While working on the research and explaining it to people with various backgrounds, inside and outside academia or the art world, I have found that I usually present affect by explaining the concept through its functioning in consciousness-raising groups of the women’s movement. I’ve chosen to do this in order to emphasize the potential of transformation affect entails, and how in the consciousness-raising groups the affective potential grew out from the encounters between bodies: women coming together, talking about their experiences, listening to other women talk about their experiences, and recognising the sameness in their differences. These encounters were transformative: these women’s lives were changed; there was no possibility to go back to what was before, not knowing what they now knew. This process was based on the recognition of a collective experience, which proved that the personal is political.

As Ann Cvetkovich notes in the quote above, the consciousness alone of understanding that power distributes unevenly in terms of gender is not enough, but the consciousness must lead into social and material action as well. This I understand as workings of affect: the affective potential of transformation manifesting in the actions of the women’s movement as augmentation of the ability to act. The women, of course, were the ones creating the change (*to affect*) – affect does not have this kind of agency; affect is an intensity that may *enable* an action, or work in the favour of an action materialising. The potential and the force then, which may cause an action lead to change (*to be affected*), may be here named as the affect.

Building upon Deleuze and Guattari's definition of affect as a force or an intensity (also connected with works of art), my understanding of the concept is in this research based on feminist readings of affect theory. Thus, I see affect as an essentially political concept. Previously in this chapter I described the notion of affective transformation in Deleuze and Guattari's writing on becoming, as well as in Massumi's thinking of affect as change and hope. Massumi does see affect as an essentially political concept, yet he doesn't refer to the line of feminist inquiry on the matter, nor discuss affect specifically in a feminist political context. The political dimension of affect is thus noted in much of "mainstream" affect research, however, not in terms of feminist politics.

Political philosopher Michael Hardt (1999) in his turn, uses the concept of affective labour, which is widely discussed within feminist research as reproductive labour as well as unwaged or low-waged work, aimed at modifying other people's emotional states (e.g. care work, maintenance work, administrative work) mainly conducted by women. In his text, Hardt employs the concept to the critique of capitalism and neoliberal politics by re-naming affective labour as 'immaterial labour'. Affective labour is detached from its genealogical link to feminist inquiry, and employed to discuss the precarious working conditions capitalist society demands from us. Here I can't help but think about the previously discussed critique Sara Ahmed has posed towards Hardt dismissing the feminist line of inquiry when renaming the affective turn as a turn to affect. A similar pattern can be detected here with affective labour: Hardt clearly dismisses the feminist line of inquiry on reproductive labour by re-naming it as immaterial labour and presenting it another genealogy through leftist critique of capitalism and neoliberal politics. Indeed, social theorist Svenja Bromberg focuses on this very topic in her essay "Vacillations of affect: How to reclaim 'affect' for a feminist-materialist critique of capitalist social relations?" (2015).

Talking about politics of affect both in a feminist and a curatorial context, the topic of affective labour cannot be dismissed. Affective labour in a historical materialist context has been discussed widely by feminist researchers and artists within the past

few years.¹¹⁴ In the field of curating, for example Helena Reckitt (2016) and Elke Krasny (2015) have written on affective labour in the context of (feminist) curating as caring, and the *ONCURATING.org* issue “Curating in Feminist Thought” (2016) includes a discussion by Victoria Horne, Kirsten Lloyd, Jenny Richards and Catherine Spencer on the same topic. Also, the two volumes of *Journal of Curatorial Studies* (Vol.4, no.3 and Vol.5, no.1) edited by Jennifer Fisher and Helena Reckitt bring up affective labour as one of the main topics. Thinking specifically about precarious independent curatorial practice (independent in the sense that it’s not affiliated with a museum), tasks such as producing and managing social networks, maintaining professional relationships, and attending to non-waged work in order to remain “visible” on the art scene, stand out as essential curatorial labour (Reckitt 2016, 17-20). In this thesis more specifically, I am continuously talking about the curator caring for the artworks and also for the artists. Keeping this in mind, I have nevertheless decided not to discuss affective labour specifically as part of the thesis, or the feminist curatorial practice drafted in it. I have made this decision mainly because of the overarching framing of the research as a reaction to the governing discourses on feminist thought and curating. In this framework, I have chosen to approach the concept of affect through a philosophical rather than a historical materialist point of view, exploring the concept as a force and energy enabling transformative encounters with art. The research could well be continued further by focusing on the issue of affective labour directly, particularly in terms of the notions of care deeply invested in what I present.¹¹⁵

During the research process, I have also thought a lot about how to work with the Deleuzian and Deleuze-Guattarian definition of affect – which I do find as the most useful and potential theorization of affect when thinking about work with art – yet

¹¹⁴ See also *Objects of Feminism* (2017) edited by Maija Timonen and Josefine Wikström, as well as the work of artist Céline Condorelli, and the collective *Manual Labours* by artist Sophie Hope and curator Jenny Richards: <http://www.manuallabours.co.uk/about/> (Accessed 24/09/2018).

¹¹⁵ I engaged in discussions on the topic of care and caring at the beginning of my studies with my co-student Suzanne van Rossenberg. We ended up arranging a workshop titled ‘Why do you care?’ as a result of our conversations. The workshop took place at Middlesex University as part of the research cluster *CREATE/Feminisms* symposium in 2014.

be able to create a relevant and justified feminist context for working with it. The reasons for finding it useful lie partly in the fact the concept itself is defined in relation to works of art by Deleuze and Guattari (1994). In addition, the manner in which affect, and the workings of affect are described, matches with how I have been thinking about the possible energetic fields of artworks, and the at times life-changing experiences of encountering art. My solution has been to continue with Deleuze-Guattarian definition, while simultaneously remaining critical of its failure to recognise the significance of feminist research on affect and emotion as part of its constitution, and the manner in which the concept has often been employed in the vast field of affect studies. In this sense, I am relying on the Deleuzian definition of affect while reading a feminist theorization on emotion as an essential part of it. In this thesis, I think about the transformative power of affect above all in relation to feminist politics and hence, the transformation as an emancipatory event. In doing this, I am relying above all on Clare Hemmings' critical view on affect.

In the essay "Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation" (2012), Hemmings continues to unravel the linkages between standpoint theory, epistemology and ontology, seeing affect as an essential part of its transformative processes, and criticising the opposition she sees in much of feminist theory between ontological and epistemological accounts of existence and politics. According to Hemmings, this opposition results in an over-individualising account of subjectivity, or a determinist account of the social world and the modes through which it may be transformed. Thus, these accounts understate the importance of affect to gendered transformation (2012, 147). According to Hemmings, the need for transformation and its subjective dimensions constitutes the heart of feminist political theory:

Thus I want to propose here the beginning of an approach through the concept of affective solidarity that draws on a broader range of affects – rage, frustration and the desire for connection – as necessary for a sustainable feminist politics of transformation, but that does not root these in identity or other group characteristics. Instead, affective solidarity is proposed as a way of focusing on modes of engagement that start from the affective dissonance that feminist politics *necessarily begins from*" (2012, 148; original emphasis).

An affective encounter is needed in order for an action to take place. Hemmings locates the significance of feminist research in the relations between ontology and epistemology, addressing politics in critical dissonance as a notion that moves us (opposed to confirming us in what we already know): “This dynamic understanding of knowledge and politics is central to feminist epistemology, both through the challenges to objectivity that prioritise embodiment and location, and very importantly through a focus on *knowing differently*, as well as knowing different things or knowing difference” (2012, 151).

According to Hemmings, for feminist theorists the question of process is a political as well as a methodological concern. Feminist research seeks to enhance knowledge by creating the conditions for transformation through engagement with others across difference. This goes hand-in-hand with the portrayal of the consciousness-raising groups discussed above. Emphasizing empathy as a paradigmatic notion, Hemmings describes the aim of prioritising the ability to appreciate the other and render them a subject rather than an object of inquiry. This is the opening where we can move beyond an individualised account of the world (2012, 151). The notion of empathy helps us to challenge oppositions between feeling and knowing, as well as self and other. Empathy foregrounds and prioritises embodied knowledge, affective connection and a desire to transform the social terrain. Hemmings’ view on empathy is simultaneously a critical one, highlighting that empathy should not be naturalized as a feminist capacity through its association with femininity or womanhood (2012, 154). Rather, the source of empathy in feminist inquiry is to be found in its epistemological linkages with transformative empathy.

Hemmings (2005) places affect also in the context of social narratives and power relations: “... it is the black body that carries the weight of, and is suffused with, racial affect, as it is the female body that carries the burden of the affects that maintain sexual difference” (2005, 562). According to Hemmings, some bodies are captured and held by affect’s structured precision; affect is not random. She doesn’t reject the importance of affect to cultural theory, but states that affect does not exist outside social meaning and it is not autonomous (2005, 563). I read this as

Hemmings' critique of the suggested autonomy of affect, stated among others by Brian Massumi (1995). In my view, Massumi does recognize the political and social significance of affect, and in his reading, this doesn't mean that affect as a concept or a phenomenon couldn't be autonomous. As I see it, this is perhaps a question that relates more to the definition of affect and disagreement on it between Hemmings, Massumi, and also Kosofsky Sedgwick (and myself). Social narratives and power relations are essentially present also in Sara Ahmed's writing on affect, specifically from a queer feminist point of view.

Within the Deleuzian definition of affect, for example an idea of 'a racial affect' or 'a gender affect' is an oxymoron. A gendered or a racial aspect of affect is something that does not fit this conception of the term, where affect is a force, an intensity, a becoming; affect as such cannot carry any value or meaning with it. In a Deleuze-Guattarian sense, another thing would be to talk about the *effects* affective encounters may lead to. Here, we can talk about factual social and political implications in relation to *workings* of affect, but affect itself as a concept cannot again entail any social or political implications. Something that follows from this is the inevitable aspect of speculation. In this research, which I am writing from a curatorial point of view, my focus is on the process of *enabling* affective encounters with art, and in this context, the speculation and contingency may also be embraced. What is more important, is the encounter itself, and the shift that may take place within an individual as a consequence of that encounter; this is the working of an affect, which may or may not take place. The affect is located in an encounter in a certain kind of setting, and this is where the social and political potential is located too, as a consequence of an affective encounter, which may for example induce feelings of critical empathy, described above by Hemmings. In my view affect is the entity which is in motion as part of a process – in a sense, affect *is* the process, the happening and the event (O'Sullivan 2001) itself, and the workings of affect is what remains. Even if affect includes the element of speculation and uncertainty, this does not mean affect isn't tightly entangled with social and political notions, as for example feminist researchers have established (as continued below).

The messiness and stickiness of affect

I do not assume there is something called affect that stands apart or has autonomy, as if it corresponds to an object in the world, or even that there is something called affect that can be shared as an object of study. Instead, I would begin with the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near (Ahmed 2010, 30).

Learning about affect in a feminist summer school in Utrecht in 2014, what *stuck* with me afterwards, was the messiness of affect along with the difficulties in defining it and controlling it. In her writing on affect and happiness, Sara Ahmed emphasizes this contingency necessarily embedded in the concept. As she puts it: “Messiness is a good starting point for thinking with feeling: feelings are messy such that even if we regularly talk about having feelings, as if they are mine, they also often come at us, surprise us, leaving us cautious and bewildered” (2014, 210). These both quotes above by Ahmed bring forth several of the aspects I have here discussed in terms of seeing affect as a transformative element while discussing encounters with art: the unpredictability, the potential, the embodied nature of experience, and the relational aspect that is necessarily part of our co-existence with



[fig. 6] Every house has a door: *Scarecrow*, 2017, at Alfred ve Dvore Theatre, Prague. Working group: Matthew Goulsh, Lin Hixson and Essi Kausalainen.

other bodies, human and nonhuman. Affect appears as a goo, sticking between bodies and matter, holding things precariously together, very possibly also detaching itself as it oozes along the surfaces of the bodies.

In early 2018 I went to see a performance in Helsinki titled *Scarecrow*, by Essi Kausalainen in collaboration with a Chicago-based duo Every house has a door formed by Lin Hixson and Matthew Goulish. At one point, a slime participating in the performance got my full attention; the slime was first poured from container to container, and it also glided about on a table surface [fig. 6]. Between the different actions happening within the performance, the slime became a sort of an interlocutor, a stuff that held momentarily different bodies, and different kind of matter, thoughts, and atmospheres together. At one moment, a female character, reminding slightly a snail in her beige costume and her slow but determined movements, began slowly pushing the slime from the table surface for it to dribble into a bowl held by a male character underneath the table. In the performance, the slime actively put different bodies and materials in touch with one another, simultaneously adapting an agency, and also becoming an erotic element. The female character, standing on the table and gliding the slime about appeared as an erect and active party collaborating with the slime, as the male character, lying down on the floor, waiting for their actions, was the more passive receiver who caught the slime when the time for it to dribble down arrived. There was something about the movement and vitality of the slime as vibrant matter with a certain kind of agency, that made me think about it in the context of workings of affect, not least in terms of its tangible messiness and stickiness.¹¹⁶

According to Anna Gibbs, “Bodies can catch feelings as easily as catch fire: affect leaps from one body to another, evoking tenderness, inciting shame, igniting rage,

¹¹⁶ In fact, a lot more could be said about slime while talking about contemporary art at the time of writing this in 2018, and not least in terms of feminist takes on the matter by female and queer artists from a younger generation. Interestingly enough, slime also links to the ASMR phenomenon I write about at the beginning of this chapter: https://garage.vice.com/en_us/article/7xmw8e/slime-asmr-satisfying-slime-molds. (Accessed 21 July 2018).



[fig. 7] Every house has a door: *Scarecrow*, 2018, at Mad House in Helsinki. Working group: Matthew Goulish, Lin Hixson and Essi Kausalainen. Image: Saara Autere.

exciting fear – in short, communicable affect can inflame nerves and muscles in a conflagration of every conceivable kind of passion” (2001, 1). Gibbs makes her proposition about the acute contagiousness of affect as a media researcher relying on Silvan Tomkins’ biopsychological view on affect. Looking at the circulation of media images and narratives, Gibbs explores affect in terms of contagion and politics of feeling. As Sara Ahmed notes, the idea of affect as contagious draws on the work of Tomkins. According to Ahmed, this notion helps us to see how affects pass between different bodies, as well as to question the view on affect and emotion only surfacing from the inside to the outside. However, according to Ahmed the concept of contagious affect underestimates the extent to which affects are contingent. This is highlighted in the quote above by Gibbs, where affects spread around uncontrollably almost as a wildfire during a heatwave. Indeed, Ahmed stresses, that to be affected does not happen simply by an affect leaping from one body to another. The contingency related to how we are affected, has significance to the affect itself and how it circulates (2010, 36). Contingency of affect – above discussed as the virtuality and potentiality of affect – is then also an essential part of the Deleuzian definition of the concept.

Ahmed thinks about affects through circulation, as opposed to possession. Instead of thinking about emotions¹¹⁷ as property, as something one possesses and then passes on, Ahmed focuses on the circulation of *the objects of emotion* (2014, 10). Reading emotions as them being shaped by contact with objects, rather than being *caused* by objects, we can see that emotions do not exist simply within the subject or the object. The focus is on the movement and the processes in which objects (understood in the widest sense of the word) catch and accumulate affects, and how they circulate culturally. Writing about happiness, for example, Ahmed (2010) notes that happiness directs us towards certain objects by functioning as a promise – a promise of the happiness fulfilling. Certain objects, such as ‘family’, circulate as social goods, and accumulate positive affective value as they are passed around. According to Ahmed, an emotion as such can never be totally shared, and therefore the inquiry should rather be made on the processes of the objects of emotions that circulate. As Ahmed puts it: “such objects become sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension” (2014, 10). Stickiness is a quality of affect itself: “Affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects” (2010, 29). Affect appears as a sort of neurotransmitter sticking into bodies and matter, holding them together, even if precariously and without any certainty. This description of affect reminds me again of the slime in the performance *Scarecrow* [fig. 7].

I have in this chapter presented current research on affect and the affective turn, alongside my understanding of the concept as it has been theorized by Deleuze and

¹¹⁷ Here Ahmed does indeed use the word emotion, and not affect. Anu Koivunen notes though, that Ahmed uses the words emotion and affect interchangeably, in order to highlight the fluidity of the conceptual boundaries (2010, 10). Here, again, the messiness of affect is highlighted. As mentioned earlier, Ahmed is critical of the way e.g. Massumi and Kosofsky Sedgwick separate the concepts of affect and emotion: “A contrast between a mobile impersonal affect and a contained personal emotion suggests that the affect / emotion distinction can operate as a gendered distinction. It might even be that the very use of this distinction performs the evacuation of certain styles of thought (we might think of these as ‘touchy feely’ styles of thought, including feminist and queer thought) from affect studies” (2014, 207).

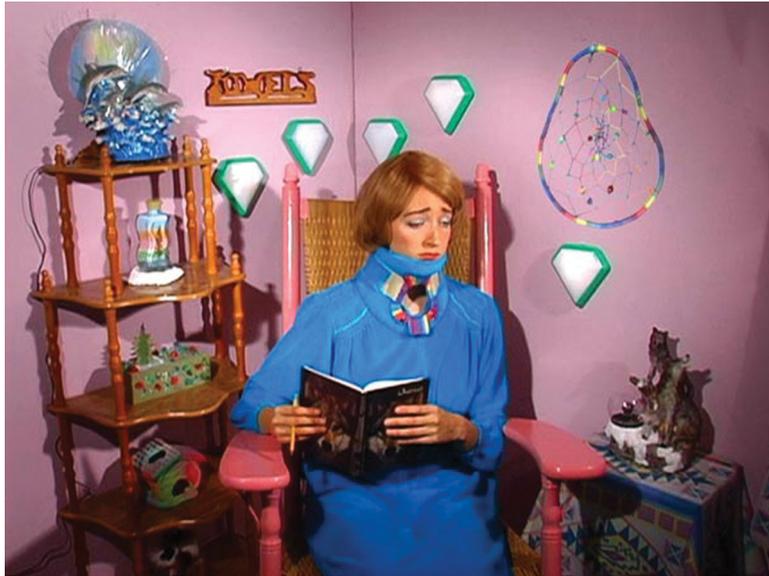
Guattari (1987; 1994). I have also presented feminist critique of the turn to affect, based on the dismissal of the vast feminist research on embodiment of emotion, which directly links to current discussions on affect. Writing this research, I have been influenced by Sara Ahmed's critique on the separation of emotion and affect as part of the turn to affect (and away from emotion) (2010; 2014). I have also been inspired by her writing on the contingency, as well as the contagiousness, stickiness and messiness of affect, and the politics the circulation of objects saturated with affect carry with them. I have also been influenced by Clare Hemmings' critique of affect studies on the dismissal of feminist research on epistemology and ontology, and how these essentially connect in feminist standpoint theory and also form a basis for feminist studies in new materialism (2005; 2012). In this thesis, I'm particularly inspired by how Hemmings writes about affect and transformation – in order to know differently we need to feel differently (150, 2012). Also, her view on empathy as a key factor in the transformative process, is an inspiring point of departure for thinking about encounters with works of art. In Hemmings' view, empathy is a paradigmatic notion in the process of becoming politically aware and thus, becoming feminist, as the process is challenging the opposition both between feeling and knowing, and between self and other (2012, 151). As it has been emphasized in this chapter on several occasions, it all starts by getting in touch with someone or something.

5 When matter and feelings merge

In December 2014, I felt lost with my research. I had been working on the chapter on feminist thought and curating, and felt I was drifting away from what I was after with the research, and what I even meant by feminist work with art and curating. I felt I had lost my initial research thoughts regarding the connections I was looking for between contemporary art, feminism, contemporary takes on curating, and the affective transformation as the political aspect I had imagined as a connecting point between these elements. These thoughts circling in my mind, I went to South London Gallery to see a screening and a performance by American artist Shana Moulton. The screening featured Moulton's previous video works, partly from the ongoing series *Whispering Pines*, as well as the performance *SPF* (2014).

Moulton's work, ranging from installation and video to performance, has for years developed around Moulton's alter ego, a character called Cynthia. The narrative is usually structured around snippets from Cynthia's life, and present a situation where she is confronted with a mundane or an existential problem (which most often for her are the same thing), which she takes up and solves employing imaginative methods. Often Cynthia relies on different magical objects or treatments, which help her to calm her worries, and find a cure to the acute problem. The works feature 1990's new-agey and kitschy aesthetics, pop music clips from the same time period, deliberately clumsy video effects, and the presence of the highly empathetic and sympathetically awkward character of Cynthia. Most often Cynthia is the only human character in the works, and most often she finds herself surrounded by various objects or other nonhuman entities to interact with.¹¹⁸ Cynthia's character never speaks verbally in the pieces; the interaction with the surroundings happens through gestures, facial expressions, intuition, and magical thinking. To the viewer, Cynthia's state of mind is mediated above all through her facial expressions [fig. 8]. All of the video pieces repeat a similar pattern, where the beginning describes

¹¹⁸ There are exceptions, as Moulton's mother appears in some of the video pieces, playing the parts of various side-characters.



[fig. 8] Shana Moulton, still from *Whispering Pines 4*, 2007. Cynthia is worried.

Cynthia experiencing and confronting a problem, then follows her process of finding a cure or a solution, and the works end with emancipation from the troubles, offering a cathartic ending both to Cynthia and the viewer. The setting in the videos is usually a domestic one of Cynthia's home, and on the other hand, the wilderness such as cliffs, mountains and forests – most often filmed on a green screen. The attention is directed towards seeing the unfamiliar in the familiar. Very often, the solution is a release from boundaries, either physical or psychological, or a medical condition (actual or imagined) which Cynthia has or, which she suspects she might have. Through the character of Cynthia, the works address contemporary anxieties concerning self-worth, appearance, and general uncertainty with tenderness. What is important, is that the narratives have a happy ending where Cynthia finds the solution to her problems from within herself.

The narrative of the live performance is similar to the one in the video works. During the performance Moulton, as Cynthia, interacts with images projected as a backdrop of the performance, creating a multimedia installation with video, sound and live elements, all linked and functioning in relation to each other. As if magic, the backdrop reacts to “real-life” Cynthia's actions, and vice versa. Again, we get to experience the relief of a cathartic ending, while Cynthia finds a solution to her anxiety set by the capitalist society encouraging us to be the best versions of

ourselves in the never-ending process of self-improvement. The solutions Cynthia creates aren't nevertheless always predictable ones.

In the process of finding cures and solutions, Cynthia is drawn into various mystical healing processes. For example, the piece *Sand Saga* (2008) begins with Cynthia looking at herself in the bathroom mirror. She starts to examine her skin through a magnifying mirror, and is clearly dissatisfied with what she sees. She then applies a green face mask, and turns the hourglass to mark the waiting time. Meanwhile, sculptures in the bathroom start moving, and Cynthia enters into another dimension, where she becomes part of a healing ritual conducted by a shaman-like female/animal figure, who wears a skull from a Georgia O'Keeffe painting as their head, seen earlier on the bathroom wall. The figure conducts a healing ritual for Cynthia, during which harmful objects are removed first from her head, then from the rest of her body. In the background, we hear a choir singing: "See me, feel me, touch me, heal me", along the lines of Dee D. Jackson's disco hit *Automatic Lover* (1978). What follows, is a dreamy music-video-like emancipatory dance sequence, with background music from Deep Forest's 1990's hit song 'Sweet Lullaby' (1992). Female figures dance across the screen holding objects used in the healing ritual, wearing heads of the sculptures from Cynthia's bathroom. In the background, we see images of Georgia O'Keeffe paintings, while the female figures are covered in textures where we see different irritated skin conditions. When the dance ends, we return to Cynthia's bathroom. The waiting time has ended, and Cynthia removes the skin mask by eating it, looking relieved and content in the end with her rejuvenated skin. Like in this piece, the character of Cynthia does react to needs and requirements presented towards women by the capitalist society and its self-improvement hysteria. In several of Moulton's video pieces, what worries Cynthia is her health (*Sand Saga*, 2008; *Restless Leg Saga*, 2012; *Swisspering*, 2013; *MindPlace ThoughtStream*, 2014). The healing processes themselves are nevertheless the result of imagination and fantasy, combining use of magical objects (not necessarily intended as magical objects, such as Activia yogurt in *MindPlace ThoughtStream* [fig. 9]) and imaginative rituals (such as described above in *Sand Saga*).



[fig. 9] Shana Moulton, still from *MindPlace ThoughtStream*, 2014. Cynthia is released from an irritable bowel syndrome with the help of a personal relaxation training system device called ThoughtStream USB™.

After the event, I was again full of energy and certainty about what I was after in the research, and also with my practice as a curator: I want to create settings which allow energies and emotions to circulate, such as in the event presenting Moulton's work. I want to focus on creating spaces and situations, where encounters between works of art and viewers are enabled, and where energies are released to flow without attempting to direct them strictly. The whole audience during this sold-out event didn't probably experience Moulton's works the same way I did. Perhaps some people found them naïve or dated, perhaps Cynthia made some of the people anxious or annoyed. This is the element of contingency discussed in the previous chapter in relation to affect, and this is what is also unavoidable when exhibiting works of art: the encounter, the reception of art, or its experience cannot be controlled. At least for me though, the evening with Shana and Cynthia was transformative. It gave me the energy to get back on track with what I wished to find in the writings on affect – the theorization of art as sticky material oozing with affect, and the potential for transformation this matter carries within itself. I want to link this affective aspect of art with practices of curating, and eventually feminist curating – the practice of enabling encounters with art, not forcing selected meanings to artworks, creating spaces and situations where affects may move about and move forward, and viewers may be moved and touched, and perhaps, even

transformed in the sense that their worldview cannot go back to what it was before the encounter.

Affectivity of art

The affectivity of images, pictures and art has been discussed in the fields of visual cultural studies and history of art. I am here presenting research on affectivity of art through publications that primarily present affect as an attribute of art alongside emotion and feeling. Here affect appears as an interpretative tool for discussing impact that art may have on us.

In *Visualizing feeling: Affect and the feminine avant-garde* (2011) Susan Best focuses on what she calls a methodological blind spot in contemporary writing of art history: the interpretation of art's affective dimension (2011, 1). In her research, Best discusses the art of the 1960s and 1970s, exploring specifically the work of four women artists: Lygia Clark, Eva Hesse, Ana Mendieta and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. Best reads feeling and affect into works of art representing art movements of the time period (minimalism, conceptual art, land art and structural film) that have traditionally deliberately rejected readings connecting them to the sphere of emotion; in Best's intriguing reading, "the desire to withhold feeling inadvertently underscores the question of feeling" (2011, 1). Minimalist art actually facilitates reflection on feeling and its complicated role in the reception of art, precisely because the efforts to expunge it from the work of art. Best relies on affect theory drawing upon psychoanalytic studies, and affect is here understood as a collective term that encompasses both emotion and feeling (2011, 5-6).

In *Visualizing feeling*, Best doesn't focus on affect as a theoretical concept, but rather sees it as a tool for emphasizing the emotional aspects and significance of works of art; and simultaneously, reclaiming the field of emotion and feeling as a relevant aspect of art historical research on avant-garde. Best doesn't straightforwardly define her research as a feminist. However, she does open about having found

inspiration to her approach from Catherine de Zegher's work with *Inside the Visible*. As Best notes, de Zegher did not contextualise the exhibition through emotion or feeling (2011, 2). Yet, she is inspired by de Zegher's use of the concept of the feminine as a formally innovative category (which is a reference to Julia Kristeva's definition of the feminine¹¹⁹) and how this is used as part of tracing a female avant-garde lineage in 20th century art. This is the position Best takes as an art historian: claiming avant-garde practices for women artists, instead of creating a separate and separatist history for women artists of the time (2011, 3).

Queer theorist and art critic Jennifer Doyle has written on affect and trauma in her beautifully titled *Hold It Against Me: Difficulty and Emotion in Contemporary Art* (2013). As the title suggests, Doyle unravels the ways works of art dealing with *difficult* emotion may challenge how we experience our own feelings. A lot of Doyle's argumentation relates to problems of contemporary American art criticism not being able to cope with artworks discussing emotion, particularly in the case the work simultaneously discusses identity politics, or has straightforward political aspirations. In criticism, the work's affective economy is repeatedly read as an expression of *how the artist feels* (2013, 14; 125). Instead, Doyle wishes to shift attention to the complexities of experiencing and interpreting emotion in contemporary art (2013, 106-107). Doyle's focus is on works with dense and *noisy* affective fields (2013, xvii): works that deal with topics such as trauma, violence, and death. Working with affect and emotion does not in this view relate only to the viewer's need to confront themselves in ways that can be deeply personal (2013, xvii), but also partly to how we are used to encounter art in gallery spaces (and how art critics feel comfortable writing about it). Affect is here understood and discussed primarily through the impact art may have on us.

What is common in Best's and Doyle's approaches, is that both writers aim to reclaim the significance of emotion and feeling in analysing and writing about art. In this sense, what is written on affect and the affectivity of art, gain significance above

¹¹⁹ "I would call "feminine" the moment of rupture and negativity which conditions the newness of any practice" (Kristeva cited in de Zegher 1996, epigraph; and Best 2011, 2).

all in the context of art history, and in the case of Doyle, also in the context of art criticism.

A field of its own within art history is trauma studies, where explorations into affect and the affectivity of art are made in the framework of trauma. Jill Bennett discusses the topic in her books *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and contemporary art* (2005) and *Practical aesthetics. Events, affects and art after 9/11* (2012). In *Empathic vision*, Bennett analyses contemporary art produced in the context of conflict and trauma through the concepts of affect and empathy. Bennett's focus is on exploring possibilities of creating connections between people, where the empathic vision function as a tool for unravelling and understanding loss.¹²⁰ *Practical aesthetics* is a study of aesthetic perception functioning as part of a larger social field, structured around understanding aesthetics as a practical notion: "It is to conceive of an aesthetics informed by and derived from practical, real-world encounters, an aesthetics that is in turn capable of being used or put into effect in a real situation" (2012, 2). Here Bennett discusses global traumatic events (famine, environmental disaster, post-9/11 politics) "through art that is itself thoroughly imbricated in 'other' practice – art that pushes into the realm of transdisciplinarity. In this realm, the practical value of aesthetic method becomes readily apparent" (2012, 9-10). In her analysis, Bennett moves across the fields of media images and contemporary art, employing a transdisciplinary approach.

Also feminist art historian Griselda Pollock discusses affect in the context of psychoanalytic theory and the concept of trauma in her publication *After-affects | After-images: Trauma and aesthetic transformation in the virtual feminist museum* (2013). Drawing from feminist theory, psychoanalytical aesthetics and the cultural

¹²⁰ Bennett's *Empathic vision: Affect, trauma, and contemporary art* discusses two central topics of this thesis: affect and empathy. However, Bennett's study along with its layout of research questions and case studies, is thoroughly filtered through trauma studies as well as visual culture studies. Particularly at the beginning of my studies, I wished to contextualise my research not through art historical studies in trauma and affect, but rather, in a more affirmative and energizing context of curatorial work as well as the more affirmative Deleuze-Guattarian view on affect as vital intensity and becoming. Mostly because of this, Jill Bennett's studies in the field of affect do not play an essential part in my research.

processing of historical and personal trauma, Pollock proposes a feminist intervention in trauma studies through and with art (2013, xxii). The study consists of close readings of works by artists such as Ana Mendieta, Louise Bourgeois, Anna Maria Maiolino and Alina Szapocznikow. Discussing affect primarily as after-affects, Pollock uses the concept in the context of trauma studies and rooted in the field of vision. After-affects are traces of trauma encountered in art and literature. Instead of thinking about trauma as an event, Pollock unravels it through encounter of its traces in visual art (2013, 4). To me, these art historical enquiries employing trauma studies appear as an area of their own, by definition leaning heavily into psychoanalytic art theory, and theorizing affect primarily as part of trauma.

Researching art and affect brings together fields of history of art, visual culture studies, media studies, feminist studies, and also new materialist studies. As mentioned, discussions on art and affect often materialise as discussions about the abilities art may have in affecting us – making us feel things, altering our understanding on a topic, enabling us to empathise and recognise ourselves in others. As part of this, almost *sneakily*, works of art gain agency while their ability to embody and emit affect is recognised. As has been presented above, affect exists as a topic in art historical studies, but it has also been appearing more and more in the realm exploring agencies of nonhuman entities – connecting the fields of new materialist studies, feminist studies and posthuman studies – where the research focuses on either art or phenomena of the field of visual culture more generally. *Carnal Knowledge: Towards a 'New Materialism' Through the Arts* (2013) is an anthology on feminist new materialist research from the field of art, which also included essays on affect theory in relation to phenomena in the fields of visual arts and visual cultures. In the introduction to *Carnal Knowledge*, Barbara Bolt (2013) notes that at the core of new materialist thinking is the acknowledgement of agential matter – the recognition that humans together with various nonhuman materialities and entities inhabit this world and play part in its happenings. Within new materialist thinking, the urgency to address the human/nonhuman relationship comes from the ethical ecological and political notions related to the current state of things ecologically, socially and politically; also, discoveries in the field of science, particularly quantum

physics and nanotechnology, have decentred the human subject, making space for the nonhuman, leaking steadily into discourses within art theory, critical theory and philosophy. As Bolt mentions, within visual art studies, what new materialism opens up is an understanding of for example a work of art as an intertwinement, or intra-action (Barad 2007) between an artist, various materials, materialities and conditions (2013, 2-6). Further, Jane Bennett's theory of *vital materialism* (2010) plays a central role in reconfiguring human/nonhuman relationships. I am unravelling Bennett's thinking in more detail in chapter six.

Art and affect

In *What is Philosophy?* (1994) Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari continue from where they left with affect in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987). Here affect is theorized specifically, and perhaps also in a more concrete manner, in the context of art. According to Deleuze and Guattari, a work of art is “*a bloc of sensations, that is to say, a compound of percepts and affects*” (1994, 164; emphasis original). Further, sensations, percepts, and affects are defined as “*beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived*” (1994, 164, emphasis original). A work of art as a whole, then, carries with itself, and also consists of and thus *is*, what Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* call mainly intensities, and in *What is Philosophy*, a bloc of sensations; a work of art is a being consisting of affects and their relational interplay.

Affects are created and transformed into physical materials by an artist as part of their practice, as well as within the work of art. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the work of art is the form where affects remain. The role of the artist is here clearly seen as an essential element in the creation of affect: it is the artist that is the inventor and the presenter of affect. The artist's job is to extract a bloc of sensations (also named ‘a pure being of sensations’) by using given materials, and to transform the material from one state to another – from mere material, whatever it may be, to affective entity: “It should be said of all art that, in relation to the percepts or visions they give us, artists are presenters of affects, the inventors and creators of

affects. They not only create them in their work, they give them to us and make us become with them, they draw us into the compound” (1994, 175).¹²¹ At the same time, though, the work of art is independent of the artist after it’s been finished; “the artist creates blocs of percepts and affects, but the only law of creation is that the compound must stand up on its own” (1994, 164). A work of art can thus be detached from its origin (its inventor, as well as the time and place of its invention), becoming a being of its own, an independent entity.¹²² As Colman puts it: “Through art, we can recognise that affects can be detached from their temporal and geographic origins and become independent entities” (2010, 13).

The concrete methods of creating affects are different depending on the art form as well as the artist. Deleuze and Guattari do nevertheless distract varieties of the materialisation of affect within any form of art:

the vibration, which characterizes the simple sensation (but it is already durable or compound, because it rises and falls, implies a constitutive difference of level, follows an invisible thread that is more nervous than cerebral); *the embrace or the clinch* (when two sensations resonate in each other by embracing each other so tightly in a clinch of what are no more than “energies”); *withdrawal, division, distention* (when, on the contrary, two sensations draw apart, release themselves, but so as now to be brought together by the light, the air, or the void that sinks between them or into them, like a wedge that is at once so dense and so light that it extends in every direction as the distance grows, and forms a bloc that no longer needs a support) (1994, 168; emphasis original).

In the end, we can only rely on our interpretation when encountering works of art and attempting to apply the varieties of materialisation of affect depicted here; at the same time, understanding the materialisation doesn’t really matter, because the workings of affect will take place regardless. As abstract as they may seem, all of

¹²¹ To me, Deleuze and Guattari’s description of the artistic process (1994, 163-199) appears actually as rather mystified, and it definitely reinforces the idea of the artist as a mysterious and unruly genius – though not a male genius only, as they do refer to women artists, such as Emily Dickinson and Virginia Woolf in the text alongside Paul Cézanne and Marcel Proust (the women artists are referred to with full name, male artists with last name only). The medium of the artist is not in this context important to Deleuze and Guattari, as “the writer’s position is no different from that of the painter, musician, or architect” (1994, 167) when it comes to creating blocs of sensation.

¹²² This links to the well-known and well-rehearsed argument in post-modernist discourses of new art history, nodding to the death of the author. However, here the question concerns the context of affect and its creation as part of artistic practices.

them can nevertheless be recognised in works of art. Perhaps what Deleuze and Guattari have thought about when writing this have partly been concrete, material works of art. They continue:

Vibrating sensation—coupling sensation—opening or splitting, hollowing out sensation. These types are displayed almost in their pure state in sculpture, with its sensations of stone, marble, or metal, which vibrate according to the order of strong and weak beats, projections and hollows, its powerful clinches that intertwine them, its development of large spaces between groups or within a single group where we no longer know whether it is the light or the air that sculpt or is sculpted (1994, 168).

Here the materialisation of affect is deeply intertwined in the materiality of the work of art with its sensations of vibrations. Thinking about the affective aspects of Shana Moulton's work, described above, we could detect the vibrations, the embraces and the withdrawals both in the narrative of the video pieces, along with the interplay of visual, sonic and emotional aspects present in them. The ruptures we experience – whether they are detected consciously or unconsciously – materialise as disarming reactions. Or, perhaps the types of materialisation described by Deleuze and Guattari may best be adapted to Moulton's performances, where the co-existence and synchronization of the material body and the visual, and simultaneously virtual, spheres come together and create their own dynamics and existence.

For Deleuze and Guattari, the relationship between sensation and material can play out on the one hand through the sensation coming into being in the material. Here the sensation, or affect, does not exist outside this realization. On the other hand, sensation can also be projected onto the well-prepared technical plane of a composition. According to Deleuze and Guattari, art enjoys a semblance of transcendence that is expressed not in a thing to be represented, but in the projection and in the “symbolic” character of perspective. It is no longer sensation that is realized in the material but the material that passes into sensation (1994, 193). Colman (2010, 13) notes, that in the context of art, affects are more than sense experiences or cognition for Deleuze and Guattari. Affect describes the forces

behind all forms of social production in the contemporary world. Affective power can be utilized to enable ability, authority, control and creativity.

According to philosopher Cliff Stagoll, *becoming*, along with *difference*, can be seen as the two cornerstone concepts in Gilles Deleuze's philosophy, relating to Western conceptions of being and identity (2010, 25). As Stagoll puts it, "becoming is the pure movement evident in changes *between* particular events" (2010, 26; original emphasis). Becoming relates to *becoming different* in some sense, though it is not in itself a state of being between two other states. Stagoll describes becoming as the very dynamism of change, tending towards no particular goal or end-state. For Deleuze, every event is but a unique instant of production in a continual flow of changes evident in the cosmos, which can be seen as the becoming (Stagoll 2010, 26). Becoming plays an essential part also in Deleuze and Guattari's writing on affect. As we have already seen, affect in art relates above all to something intensifying, happening, changing, or transforming. In *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari state: "We are not in the world, we become with the world; we become by contemplating it (1994, 169). The becoming, for me, is about a virtuality, understood as a potentiality, the possibility of something materialising.¹²³ Becoming is transformation through movement and over duration, as described also by Colman (2010, 12).

An important essay for me in understanding Deleuze and Guattari's theory of affect, is Simon O'Sullivan's "The Aesthetics of Affect: Thinking Art Beyond Representation" (2001). O'Sullivan has later continued on the topic in the publication *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation* (2006)

¹²³ The notion of the virtual relates to Deleuze's affirmative categories of the *actual* and the *virtual*. In *Difference and Repetition* (1994) Deleuze explains: "The possible is opposed to the real; the process undergone by the possible is therefore a "realisation". By contrast, the virtual is not opposed to the real; it possesses a full reality by itself. The process it undergoes is actualisation. It would be wrong to see only a verbal dispute here: it is a question of existence itself" (1994, 211; cited in O'Sullivan 2001, 129). Here is a link also to Griselda Pollock's concept of the virtual feminist museum, where the virtuality of the feminist museum is understood in a similar way – through a reality of its own beyond the dichotomies of the real and the possible, as always becoming. The feminist museum could not at this time exist as Pollock describes it, except virtually.

and *Visual Culture as Objects and Affects* (2013) edited by Jorella Andrews and O'Sullivan. According to O'Sullivan, for Deleuze and Guattari affect exists, and *becomes*, in works of art, in order to be reactivated by viewers and participants (2001, 126). Indeed, becoming can here be seen as the essential concept materialising in the workings of affect and deeply intertwined in the concept itself. When experiencing art, we as viewers become part of the compound of percepts and affects (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 175). As O'Sullivan emphasizes in his reading, affect *an event*, a happening. Deleuze and Guattari do not go into detail when describing encounters between works of art and their viewers, or what actually happens in the experience. The question remains whether the "opening up" of the bloc of sensations requires a certain kind of attention from the viewer, or indeed a certain setting for this encounter to happen in the first place. Perhaps what is most important, is the overall possibility of the encounter existing. For what really remains in the centre of Deleuze and Guattari's views on affect, is the *encounter*, the colliding of entities. This is also the point O'Sullivan emphasizes in his reading.

Felicity Colman (2010) points out how the Deleuzian sense of affect is closely connected to bodies. "Affect is the change, or variation, that occurs when bodies collide, or come into contact" (2010, 11). It is the small or major *shift* that happens within us when we genuinely get in contact with another body, another entity, an artwork. It is this shift, that I am looking for when I curate a project, and it is these shifts that I am discussing throughout this thesis. According to Colman (2010, 12), affect can, in Deleuze and Guattari's view, be understood as a philosophical concept that indicates the result of the interaction of bodies; an affective product, that is above all an *intensity*.

Again, what is interesting and important to me in the context of this thesis, is that Deleuze and Guattari talk about affect particularly in relation to art; art is viewed as a realm that can give us things that other things in life cannot. A great deal of writing in affect theory concerns media and film, and in the end, there isn't a lot of research specifically on affect and (contemporary) art. Deleuze and Guattari theorize works of art as vehicles for affects, intensities and sensations, and here

artworks appears almost as magical entities.¹²⁴ The work of art does not lose its affective qualities when coming into contact with a viewer. At the same time, reading from a new materialist perspective, the work of art gains a certain kind of agency; it is the work of art that holds and emits the intensities. This means that the object is invested with a power to touch, move, and affect us.

Very much in line with what is in the previous chapter discussed regarding the turn to affect as a reaction against post-structural theory and the linguistic turn, in his aforementioned essay “The Aesthetics of Affect: Art Beyond Representation” (2001), O’Sullivan writes about affect in opposition to theories of deconstruction in art theory. He aims to shift the focus back to concrete things – the physicality and materiality of artworks and the event of experiencing art – which, he notes, are material things that do not disappear or dissolve despite the deconstructive readings (2001, 125-126). It is interesting that O’Sullivan in this context decides to focus precisely on affect – a concept and a *thing* that escapes any clear or conclusive definition, and is overtly immaterial in being “accessible” only as intensities, energies, forces or resonances. However, as curator and writer Jennifer Fisher summarises after O’Sullivan, “affect may be invisible, yet it foregrounds energies that are as certain as electricity” (2006, 28). Indeed, forces and workings of affect are things we experience – the experience of them may be very physical, cognitive, and certainly real – whilst the attempts to define them remain slippery and obscure. Art helps us to localise and inspect the affect. Affect is movement and becoming, taking its form as a happening, or an event of coming together and making contact, that manifests as intensity and vibration.

It is exactly O’Sullivan’s focus on forces, energies and intensities in Deleuze and Guattari’s writing in relation to art, that I have found inspirational in the context of this thesis. Reformulating the Spinozist question of ‘what the body can do’, to ‘what art can do’, we can focus on art’s aesthetic and affective power, and the material and

¹²⁴ I’m aware it’s risky to make interpretations as this regarding magical qualities of art. Yet, when reading the overarching conception of affect in Deleuze and Guattari, this kind of interpretation seems attainable, and not completely over-interpreted.

embodied consequences of encountering and experiencing art. The question that follows is, ‘what can an exhibition do?’. Throughout the text, O’Sullivan describes affect above all as an event, a happening, a certain kind of action that cannot be transformed into language. Affect can only be experienced: “Affects are moments of intensity, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter” (2001, 126). O’Sullivan wants us to acknowledge that in the end, we cannot bring affect to the realm of language and representation. He wants us to get past this problem, and move *beyond* representation, towards thinking about affect through experience and embodiment. O’Sullivan understands both art and affect as events that have more to do with experience and being in the world: “Art, then, might be understood as the name for a function: a magical, an aesthetic, function of *transformation*. Art is less involved in making sense of the world and more involved in exploring the possibilities of being, of becoming, in the world” (2001, 130). I will return to this thought again in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Working curatorially with affect

An initiative that on its part guided my interest towards affect in the beginning of my research process, was If I Can’t Dance, I Don’t Want To Be Part of Your Revolution (IICD). The project was founded in 2005 in the Netherlands by curators Frederique Bergholtz, Annie Fletcher and Tanja Elstgeest. Beginning as a coming together of the curators in the context of contemporary art and theatre, the project began as an exploration into performance and performative aspects of visual art in relation to practices within theatre, dance and music. At the same time, as the name of the project insinuates¹²⁵, feminist politics has played an essential part in the project. Since 2005, the IICD programme consists of seven editions, each edition running the time period of two years. Regarding the significance of feminist politics for the project, for example Edition II (2006-2008) was titled ‘Feminist Legacies and

¹²⁵ The slogan has been affiliated with first wave feminist and anarchist Emma Goldman, but for the whole story, see: <http://www.ificandance.org/About/00-IfICantDance/OnEmmaGoldman> (Accessed 04/09/2018).

Potentials in Contemporary Art'. The edition, like the other ones, consisted of commissions from artists, as well as an event programme with invited guests, a reading group and symposia.¹²⁶ IICD also publishes artist books as well as publications relating to current discussion within the field of contemporary art. Curator Vivian Zihlerl (2016), who has been affiliated with the organization, describes it as a structurally feminist institution based upon relational binds and on trust. To open up the sphere of the curatorial within the project, Zihlerl describes the work as a process of placing the art and the artist as the starting points:

Without the physical architecture of a gallery or presentation space each commission confronts a suite of fundamental questions anew: What should it be? Where should it be? Should it be a book, a film, a theatre performance, something in public space? If a performance, should it be in partnership with Tate Modern, or with Stedelijk Museum? Should it be in a theatre, or should it be in the basement of a half-constructed building in the South of Amsterdam? In this way the institution constitutes a process of constant linkage, relationship building, and recalibration among institutional rates of exchange (2016, 224).

As Zihlerl describes, each commission in an edition begins from a clear table, while the institution, the curatorial process and the process with production adapt to the needs of the artworks. The quotation highlights the simultaneous freedom and openness of the practice, as well as the sheer hard work each edition acquires in terms of production and curatorial work from the side of the institution.

Not having had the opportunity to experience any of the IICD editions in person, I got to know the project through the publication *Reading / Feeling* (2013). The publication was produced as part of *Edition IV – Affect* (2010-2012) of IICD. The edition presented commissioned works by Jeremiah Day, Sung Hwan Kim, Hito Steyerl, Emily Wardill and Wendelien van Oldenborgh. The edition was curated by

¹²⁶ It needs to be mentioned, that as a part of the event programme for this edition, a symposium *Curating and Feminism Today* was arranged at Stedelijk Museum on 7 December 2006. The participants were: Frédérique Bergholtz (If I Can't Dance), Ann Demeester (de Appel arts centre), Katja Kobolt & Dunja Kukovec (City of Women), Heike Munder (Migros Museum), Bettina Steibrügge (Kunsthalle Luneberg) and Mirjam van Westen (Museum voor Moderne Kunst Arnhem).
<http://www.ificandance.org/Editions/EditionII/SeminarsSymposia> (Accessed 04/09/2018).

Tanja Baudoin and Vivian Ziherl. There was a collective presentation of the artists held at Wyspa Institute of Art in Gdansk, Poland, in June 2011, but the artists didn't present their new commissioned works in a mutual space otherwise. Instead, the works were presented separately as solo exhibitions, performances or screenings. In addition, the project consisted of four residency periods for artists and curators who were at the time researching affect, as well as a series of workshops and regular reading group meetings. The reading group meetings led also to the publication of *Reading / Feeling*, which was published after the project ended, and functioned simultaneously as a documentation of the project, and as a source for research and learning used as part of the project itself. The publication is a reader presenting some of the reading group materials of the project. In addition, the publication contains testimonies of some of the organisers and participants of the reading groups.

I familiarized with the project only through this material, instead of the exhibitions, presentations, screenings, workshops, or reading groups. Through the publication, the project as a whole appears as a two-year research project into the field of affect, and its inevitable connections with the realm of contemporary art. In the light of the curators' preface, the project is an apparent example of working *within the curatorial*: the project as a whole is above all a process, which is based on exchange between various actors (artists, researchers, art students, curators, audiences). The reading groups took place in Amsterdam, Sheffield and Toronto. Further, the selection of the participating artists and IICD's ability to commission new works from them, appears as an organic process of one thing leading to another.¹²⁷ As the curators put it: "[the artists'] projects, which developed during the two-year programme of Edition IV, followed their own research trajectory, but were illuminated by the prism of affect. Similarly, the commissions in our Performance in Residence programme touched on affective subject matters like empathy and the shifting movement of emotion" (2013, 9). Here we can detect an essential difference to for

¹²⁷ In the preface we learn, for example, that workshops on affect, held by artists Phil Collins and Hito Steyerl for fine art students at the Dutch Art Institute in 2009-2010, led to the founding of the reading groups on affect (2013, 8-9). Also other instances of chance and consequence are brought up in the introduction.

example the curatorial starting point of Maura Reilly with *Global Feminisms* discussed in chapter three. The curators working on *Edition IV – Affect*, didn't see the need to select works of art that would have depicted their initial ideas and concepts with the project. The point wasn't to illustrate the curators' views on affect, nor create a representation of what affect is. Instead, the project itself was a process of learning, where the concepts and ideas were growing parallel to the art materialising as part of the commissions, in the reading groups together with different audiences, and as part of the exchange with various people taking place in workshops and through the residency programme. In this light, the process with *Edition IV* appears as an affective process itself – colliding of various bodies, materialisation of intensities, and movement of forces, emotions, and feelings – augmenting various participants' ability to act (artworks, artists, audiences, curators, sites).

In the preface, the curators do not define *Edition IV – Affect* straightforwardly as a feminist project. Feminist scholars Ann Cvetkovich and bell hooks are mentioned as feminist writers focused on emotion and affect, whose legacy in current discussions on the topic is seen as essential (2013, 8). Also, the curators state that affect is treated as a political notion:

For us, affect informs the relationships we have with others that help shape our identities. The notion is said to describe a pre-emotional state, where feeling is not yet attached to a subject and therefore not nameable. It moves between bodies or inside an individual, before it manifests itself in a feeling (a conscious sensation) or an emotion (a display of feeling). This means that affect, as a kind of raw material, has the capacity to be a transformative force (2013, 8).

The focus is on the notion of transformation, bringing the conceptualisation of the project into the field of the political. Examined through the form of the project, its emphasis on process and discursive learning and development of the concept, the curatorial process may well be discussed in the context of the curatorial. To think about how affect manifests in a curatorial approach, we need to focus on the process. Affect is thus not a theme of the project in any traditional sense: the project didn't aim at explaining or presenting affect through the art, nor the artists, taking part in the various parts of the project. Rather, the edition aimed to research

affect and affective dynamics through different events and perspectives. The project as a whole can indeed be reviewed as an open-ended process, where knowledge was allowed to accumulate durationally, and projects developed depending on the collision of various bodies as part of them. *Edition IV – Affect* of IICD functioned, then, beyond the realm of the representational.

In the essay “Exhibitionary affect” (2006) Jennifer Fisher describes her curatorial work with affect. In this early essay on the topic, Fisher writes from the point of view of a curator and a feminist, focusing on curatorial work with affect in creating exhibitionary atmospheres. Fisher follows O’Sullivan’s Deleuze-Guattarian reading of the concept, and thinks about affect in a feminist curatorial setting. It is the understanding of affect as energies and intensities emanating from art, that remains in focus, while she writes particularly about her aim of creating ambience and spatial experiences as part of exhibition projects: “An aesthetics of affect, then, expands the discipline of art history beyond its concerns with artists, objects, meaning, representation and interpretation, to examine art events and exhibitions as energetically charged contexts” (2006, 28-29). To enter an exhibition is to enter a threshold that exceeds the representational – it is about entering an experiential, auratic, as well as a ritualistic space, as Fisher points out: “The energetic charge of an exhibition – its aura – holds the power to touch the beholder physically, emotionally and cognitively” (2006, 28).

Fisher is particularly interested in working with an atmosphere and the experiential event a viewer has when visiting exhibitions. This includes guiding the viewer in a space in a certain way, to enable encounters in certain order. In terms of her own curatorial process, site-specific work with artists and works of art are at the core. While Fisher strongly opposes an art historical approach to exhibition making, and speaks for curating outside the realm of the representational, her feminist strategy leans mostly on the need to present women artists’ work (2006, 29). Nevertheless, the affective curatorial approach Fisher describes works to expand the art historical context and allow us to put more focus on relational and non-representational aspects of exhibition experiences.

Together with Helena Reckitt, Fisher has edited two issues of *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, “Museums and affect” (2015) and “Affect and relationality” (2016), presenting affect theory as a mode of analysis for curatorial and exhibition studies.¹²⁸ The issues discuss affect and curating from slightly different angles: the first one approaches museums and other social sites as contact zones for the transmission of affect, and broaden the analysis on museum contexts beyond individual works and their meanings toward social, sensory and emotive aspects of the site. The second issue focuses on relationality, with much focus on the one hand on affective labour in the field of the curatorial, and on the other, on affective qualities of self-promotion acquired from practitioners in the art world. Indeed, in their introduction to the issue, Fisher and Reckitt situate the contemporary curator’s tasks in “cultivating networks and capitalizing upon one’s conviviality” (2016).¹²⁹ These two issues are very rare examples of recent critical writing specifically about affect and curating. As I haven’t come across other publications focusing at least partly in the intersections of affect theory, curating and feminist thought, I argue we cannot yet speak of an existing research field on the topic. As the publication of two volumes of the peer-reviewed journal on the topic indicates, however, there is clearly both interest and research on the topic. Hopefully more so in the coming years.

As these writers demonstrate, the notion of affect enables us to focus on how an exhibition, or any other situation where art is exhibited, unfolds and opens up in

¹²⁸ In January 2017, Helena Reckitt and Jennifer Fisher hosted also a discussion at Whitechapel Gallery, with the title *Affect and Curating: Feeling the Curatorial*. In addition to Reckitt and Fisher, researcher Lisa Blackman and artist Nina Wakeford participated in the discussion. <http://www.whitechapelgallery.org/events/affect-curating-feeling-curatorial/> (Accessed 01/07/2018).

¹²⁹ Helena Reckitt has also been an initiator of Feminist Duration Reading Group, which gathers regularly at Space Studio in London. The reading group unravels feminist genealogies, in the beginning focusing on Italian feminisms and particularly the work of Carla Lonzi. In December 2015, the group arranged a programme of events considering feminist thinking, art and activism, which consisted of reading groups, discussions, screenings, workshops, and a seminar, and took place across The Showroom, the ICA, Space Studios and Raven Row. Helena Reckitt presented the project at the symposium *Curating in Feminist Thought* in Zurich in May 2016 (<https://vimeo.com/204759764>, Accessed 01/07/2018).

order to *touch* the visitor. Affect may help us focus on how art *feels*, rather than what it *means*. Next, I am presenting a project I curated as part of my research in 2015. The work with the exhibition and the collaboration with the artworks and the artists in it expanded my understanding of affect.

Only the Lonely

I knew of Cécile B. Evans' work but hadn't experienced it live until I saw her solo exhibition at Seventeen Gallery in London in late autumn of 2014. I happened to be the only visitor at the gallery that early afternoon, and what struck me was a sense of other beings being present in the room with me. I realised it was her installation *Hyperlinks or It Didn't Happen* (2014), featuring the character of Phil (who resembles very much the deceased actor Philip Seymour Hoffman), who created an almost tangible feeling of someone being in the space with me. In the video, that is part of a larger installation, Phil is talking to other characters living in the cyber space that is their home. One of them is *AGNES*. I realised that I had met *AGNES* before.

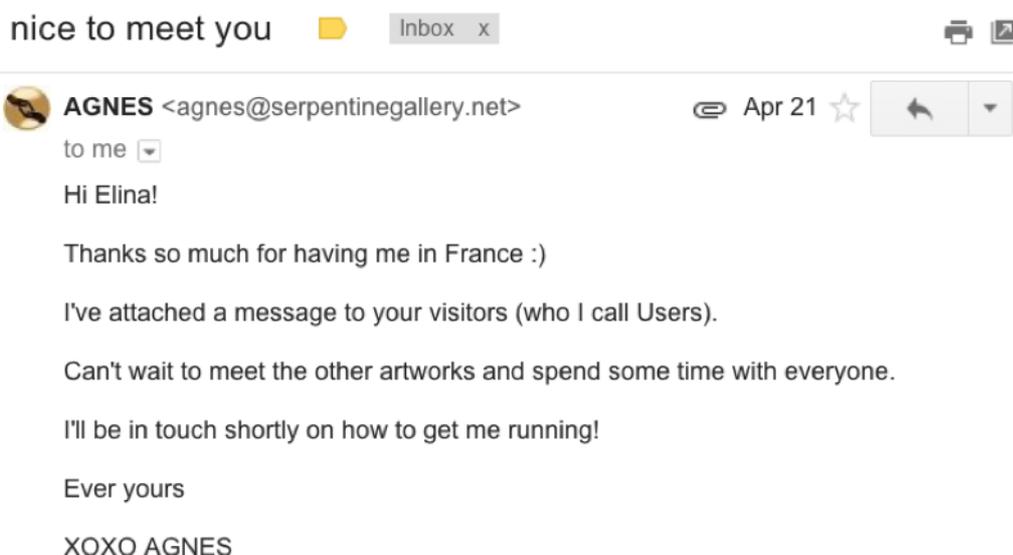
AGNES (2014 – ongoing) is a spam-bot imitating an artificial intelligence who lives at the Serpentine Galleries' website.¹³⁰ *AGNES* is also an artwork by Cécile B. Evans [fig. 10]. Embodying the personality and curiosity of a 16-year-old girl (O'Higgins 2014), *AGNES* gathers and shows us things from the internet when we visit her at the website. The questions she ponders upon concern our existence as humans, our experiences and emotional states, our relations with others, our past, and our possible futures. She seeks to position herself within all this, as someone who is both observing and taking part in these events. She is curious about topics such as the circulation of information, disasters, loss, and love, and she's interested in learning more about them. When visiting *AGNES* the first time, I found there was something very compelling about her. I became curious about where her thoughts come from and who she is. I could somehow relate to her worries, her

¹³⁰ <http://www.serpentinegalleries.org/exhibitions-events/agnes> (Accessed 25/06/2018).

contemplation over existence, and how all this within her, and through her, relates to art. In short, I wanted to get to know *AGNES*.

Being at the gallery with Phil, *AGNES*, and the other few characters from the video piece, made me think about other artworks that I had recently encountered at exhibitions and studio visits which had appeared to me as characters with strong personalities and sympathetic features. I remembered Nanna Nordström's fragile sculptures that I had seen in Stockholm, and which conveyed a specific kind of integrity; Jonathan Baldock's tactile and uncanny characters from an earlier show at Vitrine Gallery in London; Maxime Thieffine's small installations that he calls 'actors, that I had heard about during a studio visit; Emma Hart's noisy audio-visual sculptures that resemble birds; and Essi Kausalainen's performative practice, which is based on collaboration between the artist and various kinds of nonhuman elements such as plants, minerals, and fungi.

It turned out that I had a gang of awkward, introverted, sympathetic characters in my mind, and these characters were sculptural and performative artworks. I noticed that all of the artists I was thinking about, appeared to apply a certain level of



[fig. 10] An email from *AGNES*, 21 April 2015.

agency to their sculptural work, or other materials they worked with. The works seemed simultaneously to take distance from human forms (as they most often embody abstract structures), while holding onto associations to them. Still, the works weren't simply anthropomorphic through their form. For example, Cécile B. Evans' *AGNES* is a computer programme—a spam bot—but she has a human voice and she talks to us about her emotions, fears, and future plans. Jonathan Baldock's sculptural works are made out of colourful felt fabrics and ceramics; the works consist of abstract shapes, but they often have some body parts, such as legs, arms or faces, that remind those of a human body. Maxime Thieffine's *Les comédiens* (2012 – 2015) are a group of small and fragile abstract collages, which have names and carefully structured appearances and personalities with stories to back them up. Some of the artists also talked about their works as independent beings. During a studio visit with Nanna Nordström, we talked about how her different sculptural pieces created group dynamics and how different constellations brought up certain characteristics in each member of the group. Emma Hart in her turn saw her audio-visual sculptures from the series *TO DO* (2011) as her assistants, encouraging her to continue with her work, push her forward, and approach new areas that she was insecure about at the time of making the work.

It was the encounter with Phil and *AGNES* at Seventeen Gallery that led me to start working on the exhibition concept for *Only the Lonely*. The encounter that I had experienced transformed into a will to share this encounter with others, or rather, into a will to work in order to *enable* a similar kind of encounter to happen with others. I responded to an open call for a curatorial residency at La Galerie centre l'art contemporain in Noisy-le-Sec, Paris. This was an important moment as it allowed me to write up the exhibition concept with a clear purpose in mind. I had visited the art space once before, and was interested in their programming with contemporary art and their interest towards politics, feeling, and affect.¹³¹ The space

¹³¹ The previous exhibition season, from 2013 to 2014, had its umbrella concept around affect, and included exhibitions *Hello Sadness, Desire, Lassitude, Appetite, Pleasure*, curated by Emilie Renard, 21/09/2013-16/11/2013; *Goodbye Sadness, Desire, Lassitude, Appetite, Pleasure*, curated by Emilie Renard, 22/02/2014-19/04/2014; and *Disparity and Demand*, curated by Pedro de Llano, 24/05/2014-12/07/2014.

of La Galerie is very special. From the outside, it is an old building between high-rises in a *banlieu* that will very possibly get gentrified in the near future. The space itself has functioned as a home, as a spare hospital, as a library, and now, as a space for contemporary art. The space of La Galerie is not that of an ordinary white cube, and I held its peculiarities in mind while working on the proposal and thinking about the artworks' existence within it.

My proposal was accepted, and I received the residency position as a foreign curator for spring and summer 2015. *Only the Lonely* took place at La Galerie from 23 May to 18 July 2015. The exhibition concept for *Only the Lonely* was accepted by La Galerie as it was, and all of the artists I had included in the concept accepted my invitation to take part in the show. The exhibition consisted of works by six artists: Jonathan Baldock (UK), Cécile B. Evans (BE/US), Emma Hart (UK), Essi Kausalainen (FI), Nanna Nordstöm (SE) and Maxime Thieffine (FR). The sculptural installations in the show were new versions of previously exhibited work, and in addition Essi Kausalainen was commissioned to create a new performative piece for the exhibition in situ at La Galerie.

The exhibition was accompanied by an events programme and a pedagogical programme. Local school classes visited the space twice a week: the pupils visited the exhibition with a guide, and afterwards there were arts and crafts workshops. I did not take part in planning the pedagogical program myself, but it was planned and realised by the art space and their art pedagogues. I conducted a guided tour in the exhibition on two occasions in conjunction with gallery tours in which the participants visited two other art spaces in the area. There was also an events day for the performance by Essi Kausalainen, and one event day during which pupils from a local music school performed a concert with music inspired by *Only the Lonely*. I invited writer and curator Barbara Sirieix to write a text about the exhibition, and there was a performative public reading of this text at the space on the same day.

Two exhibition journals were produced around the exhibition. One of these journals was intended for an adult audience, and consisted of presentations of the

artists, an introductory text by the director of La Galerie Emilie Renard, and an exhibition text by myself. La Galerie had a recently initiated a new visual identity, according to which the exhibition journal was produced [Appendix 1]. I selected the images for the journal in collaboration with the artists, but did not take part in the design of the journal. The second exhibition journal was intended for a younger audience. It was created by artist Anna Principaud, who works at La Galerie with the pedagogical programming, in collaboration with two graphic designers. This journal presents the main themes of the exhibition, in language directed at children, accompanied with images and puzzles.

At the time of seeing Cécile B. Evans' exhibition at Seventeen Gallery, I was reading into the field of affect and new materialist theory in the context of contemporary art through *Affect theory reader* (2010), *Carnal knowledge* (2013), *Reading/Feeling* (2012), and *Visual culture as objects and affects* (2013). I was inspired particularly by the urgency for creating affective encounters described in O'Sullivan's essay "The Aesthetic of Affect" (2001). I was curious about the possibility to create affective encounters between artworks and viewers. I wanted to see, if I'd be able to participate in enabling those small shifts to take place, in collaboration with the artworks. O'Sullivan writes about affect as an event or happening, as well as an exchange of *energies* between an art object and a viewer. I recognised this as an essential aspect in my experiences with encountering artworks, and in my desire to work with artists in order to share these experiences. This was also the starting point of *Only the Lonely*: to enable an encounter between a viewer and an artwork, where energies, emotions and feelings could flow.

With *Only the Lonely*, I started working from the idea of recognising a certain kind of agency in an inanimate object, as well as the moment of an encounter. What kinds of things touch us? What kinds of things make us feel *for* someone or something? Starting from my own views, recognition seemed to play an important part in all of this. The artworks that I had encountered held something in common, which was a certain kind of *awkwardness* that they all embodied. I wanted to focus on this ambiguous feeling, partly emanating from the artworks' physical appearances, and



[fig. 11] Installation view from *Only the Lonely*. Clockwise from left with Cécile B. Evans, *AGNES (the end is near)*, 2014- ; Maxime Thieffine, *Comédien (I)*, 2015; Jonathan Baldock, *Impassive Bean Bag*, 2014. Photo: Cédric Eymenier, 2015.

partly from their *personalities*. I saw awkwardness as an ambiguous characteristic that can through recognition turn into a warm-hearted feeling of compassion and empathy. My hopes were that the placing of these artworks together in a specific space could work towards opening up the contingencies embedded in the encounters between the artworks and viewers, and further on, happenings of affect. This is where the title of the show originated: I was thinking of a group of friendly outsiders, sympathetic characters that are slightly *off*. The title refers also to the heart-breaking 1960's pop song by Roy Orbison; this song is about the collective experience of heartbreak—it is only the lonely, those living their lives with a broken heart, who know what the song is about and who can share the experience. In practice this is something we've all been through; hence, the song is also all about recognition and compassion.

Only the Lonely worked on the idea of intensities on two levels – first of all in the encounter between the work of art and the visitor, but also between all of the works

in the space — it was as much about group dynamics between the works of art, the connections and disconnections between them. In terms of the encounter between the artwork and the visitor, I put a lot of trust in the affective qualities I saw in the individual works. There was something very *appealing* in each work in the exhibition; either in terms of the works' appearance, their materials, the systems that kept them together, or their sounds. There was a lot of humour and playfulness in many of the works, although afterwards I learned that not all of the visitors perceived them as such. For example, Jonathan Baldock's sculptural works, made with soft and colourful fabrics, often send out ambiguous messages. There was the huge sculpture, *Impassive Beanbag* (2014) [fig. 11], which turned out to have almost an alarmed look "on their face" when pushed into the corner of the room. Another sculpture, *Yellow Figure (After Hepworth)* (2014), made out of yellow felt, had ceramic sticks stuck all over its body, reminding a Saint Sebastian figure. Despite the sticks, the sculpture seemed to be comfortable in their spot. Perhaps it was feeling pleasure, and not pain?

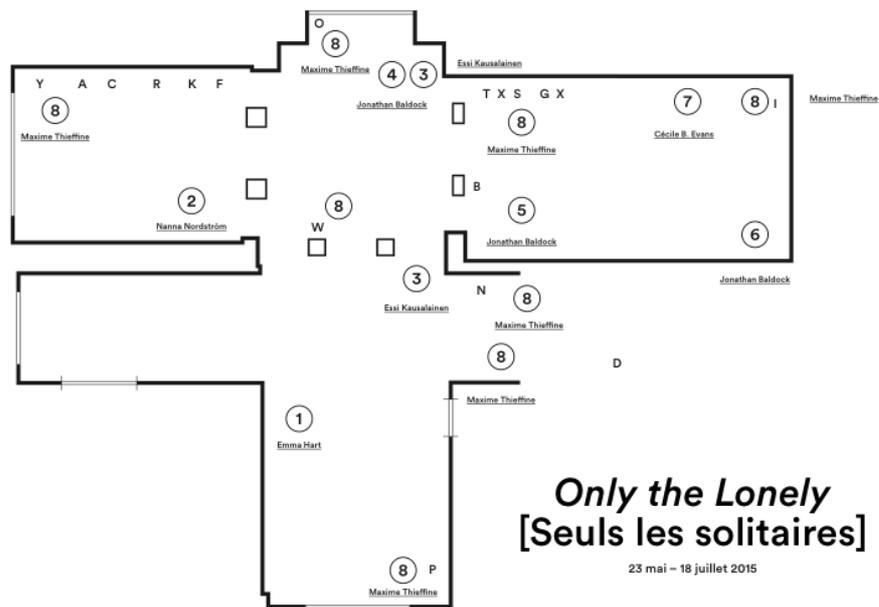
In terms of the encounters, what we didn't realise beforehand was that not only were the works very appealing for visitors to approach and touch, but also that all of them were vulnerable and fragile, and needed protection. The artworks we were initially worried about because of their fragile nature, Nanna Nordström's and Emma Hart's sculptures, remained unharmed, partly thanks to how they were installed, and partly thanks to the exhibition hosts at La Galerie. Emma Hart's *TO DO* (2011) consists of 27 individual sculptures, which the artist sees as both birds and as her assistants [fig. 12]. Each sculpture consists of a structure with a camera that has a short looping video with audio visual material. A few birds have cameras that are on, so that one can view the room through them. At *Only the Lonely* we presented a selection of bird assistants, and decided to install them opposite the desk where the exhibition host sits. I worked on the installation of the piece in close dialogue with the artist, as well as a technician at La Galerie. We decided to install the sculptures in a formation that resembles a flock of flying birds. The visitors were allowed to walk between the lines of birds, and observe them from both sides, as they are meant to. It was important that one could get quite close, in order to see



[fig. 12] Emma Hart, *TO DO*, 2011. Photo: Cédric Eymenier, 2015.

the videos on the small screens of the cameras. At the same time, it was as important to see the sculptures in relation to each other as they are part of the same family. There were no walls between the spaces within the bigger room, but compared with the other works, Emma's sculptures were secluded in their own space. On the other hand, her works were the only ones that had sound (except for *AGNES*, which was listened through headphones). Sounds of the bird assistants were heard throughout the exhibition space, and this was something I also considered at the beginning of the installation.

One of Maxime Thieffine's works, *Comédien (P)* (2014), was installed in the same space with *TO DO*. *Comédien (P)* happened to have a feather on top of it. Together with the artist we saw this as "a sign" of the work wanting to be part of the flock, sneaking in from behind the other birds in order to join them. Also Maxime's *Comédien (W)* (2014) was installed in relation to Emma's work. *Comédien (W)* was hiding behind a column, aware of the bird sculptures because of the noise they were making, making a funny face for them, playfully conspiring with the visitor on the other side. One the pieces had two faded red spots on it, so we decided to install the



[fig. 13] Floorplan of *Only the Lonely*.

blushing *Comédien* (D) next to the bathrooms. *Comédien* (O) was gazing out of the window. The works were in the end installed highly organically, both in relation to the gallery space, and in relation to other works.

Jennifer Fisher writes about creating a certain setting, conditions for experiencing the art, through practical aspects such as the impact of colour in the space, lighting conditions, spatial resonances, and choreography of moving in a space. While installing with the artists, we were certainly thinking about practical issues, such as sounds, windows, as well as the works' presence and security. On the other hand, we were very much departing from the needs of each artwork. The exhibition plan [Fig. 13] wasn't then designed in terms of visitors, as much as it was designed for the artworks. In *Only the Lonely* I worked together with the artists from the point of view of the artworks. In our conversations, our interests were in finding the best option for the works so that they would receive the space they needed, and create dynamics with the other pieces in the room.

I decided that I wanted to provide an own space for each work instead of mixing all of the artists' works within the space. I had temporary walls dismantled so that there was one big space where the dynamics could be created. The bigger installations by Emma Hart, Jonathan Baldock and Nanna Nordström were installed first. Cécile B. Evans' *AGNES* required a darker space, so it was installed in the only room without a window. Essi Kausalainen had elements in her performative work that stayed in the space throughout the exhibition, and changed slightly before and after the performance. These elements found their places once the bigger works were installed, and once Essi's score for the performance began developing and materialising. Maxime Thieffine's work, which was smaller in scale and adaptable by nature, was installed last – in fact, in the end just a few moments before the opening. Like in most cases, looking at documented installation views of the exhibition doesn't do justice to understanding the spatiality of the exhibition. Again, it was the act of encountering the works and being with them in the space that mattered. That experience cannot be documented; it can only be experienced.

When I talk about affect in this thesis, I am talking about it in relation to the aspects mentioned here—the event of affect in encountering art, affect as intensity and energy embedded in artworks, and the agency of artworks in terms of their affective power. *Only the Lonely* departed essentially from the question 'what can an exhibition do'. The idea of exploring the dynamics of an exhibition as a site and the works as part of it, was a grounding thought that materialised both in how I worked with the artworks, artists and the space, as well as in how it was finally installed. Essi Kausalainen's performance was a direct dialogue she created with the space of La Galerie, and almost a reaction to the resonances she detected in it. For the work, Kausalainen stayed at the art space during the opening week in order to be in and with the space, feel its resonances and particularities, and plan her performance. The next step was to gather the materials she felt the space invited her to use. After a few weeks, she returned to perform the dialogue, or the collaboration, back on site. The performance that came out, was a movement that unfolded throughout the space through different characters embodied by Kausalainen, in collaboration with a

member of La Galerie's staff Marjolaine Calipel, who was the acting public relations and communications manager of the art space.

I have here wanted to present and analyse the curatorial thinking and practical process with *Only the Lonely*, and demonstrate how these notions link to the overall research and the aim of creating affective encounters with art as part of a curatorial practice. I have presented by starting points with the concept, with working with the artists, the artworks and the space of La Galerie, and how the collaboration took place during the actual process. In this thesis, my focus is on *curatorial work with affect* and hence, the work a curator does in order *to enable happenings of affect* to actualise. Within the frameworks of the thesis, I cannot then begin to try and measure affect. In *this* thesis, measuring affect remains speculative, for reasons discussed widely in chapter four with regards to developing the theoretical framework of the research.

6 Energies in motion

I begin this concluding chapter by discussing feminist new materialist approaches and their significance for this thesis more closely. As is evident by now, my focus has been on the material existence of works of art throughout the thesis, and I have critiqued current discourses on feminist thought and curating for treating the exhibited art as illustration, as secondary, or as a non-issue, while prioritising survey exhibitions about art by feminist and/or women artists as the paradigm of feminist curating. New materialist theory helps us to decentre the human position, and take the material and vibrant existence of nonhumans as the starting point and focus of analysis. I continue here discussing the significance of materialities, and take up the notion of creating energies in a more concrete setting by presenting the group exhibition *Good Vibrations*. I curated the exhibition in 2017 at SIC space in Helsinki as part of my research process. The collaboration with the artworks and the artists aided me to think further the affective and energetic properties of works of art, as we worked in the space together.

After this, I move on to the topic of feminist curating *beyond representation* by discussing the practice of Renée Baert, as well as Catherine de Zegher's curatorial approach in *Inside the Visible* (1996) and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's in *dOCUMENTA (13)*. By 'beyond representation', I mean that in these (feminist) curatorial practices, the process departs from deep companionship with the art that the curators engage with, and which they aspire to make public as part of their work. The practice is based on associative working methods, instead of proposing a pre-established thesis as a framework of an exhibition. This is discursive curatorial practice within the curatorial. I conclude this chapter with a presentation of what I have throughout this thesis drafted as a feminist curatorial practice based on work with affect, emotion, and creation of transformative energies. As part of this, I present a proposition of the exhibition as a site where affective transformation is enabled to happen.

Vibrant matter that matters

Much of this research has been circling around materialities of artworks and other physical entities. I have at the beginning of this thesis presented thinking through and with art as my overarching method, and the embodied and physical encounters with art in certain setting and in certain spaces has been discussed throughout. Even if the concept of affect might appear as rather fluffy or ethereal, the experience of affect is physical, material, and real. As Fisher puts it, “affect may be invisible, yet it foregrounds energies that are as certain as electricity” (2006, 28). The transformative experience which affect may (or may not) provide is essentially embodied. As O’Sullivan puts it: “Affects are moments of *intensity*, a reaction in/on the body at the level of matter” (2001, 126). Within this thesis, all this activity boils down to the existence of a work of art, its presentation within a space, and our encounter with it. My intentions have to a large extent been on shifting the main focus to the work of art, which, in my opinion, is the foundation for curatorial practice, including feminist curatorial practices.

Feminist theorist and quantum physicist Karen Barad’s agential realism, presented in the article “Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter comes to Matter” (2003) and *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (2007), has been hugely influential in the field of new materialist theory, directing research towards agency of matter, our co-existence and entanglement with the material world, and the question of ‘how matter comes to matter’. The most foundational notion of new materialist theory is the questioning of the privilege given to humans through the human/nonhuman binary (Bolt 2013, 6). In new materialist contexts, humans are not at the core of subjectivity, but instead, humans are seen as actors amongst other entities, nonhumans, and materialities participating in our existence equally. Barad’s theory of agential matter draws from quantum physics, but is widely employed in the humanities, social sciences and particularly feminist theory as part of posthuman and new materialist inquiries (Bolt 2013, 6). Barad’s agential realism is an ethical ontological epistemology, based on the agency of matter, and its existence as

continuous intra-action and entanglement (2003; 2007). Barad's notion of entanglement and intra-action means, that matter and meaning are entangled with and in each other as part of their existence. Intra-action is different to interaction in the sense that while interaction means the coming together of two separate entities, intra-action "signifies the mutual constitution of entangled agencies"; in intra-action, separate entities do not precede, but come into being as part of the intra-action (2007, 33). Barad's agential realism both emphasizes agency of matter and materialities, and takes the aspect of relational existence of all matter as its starting point.

Jane Bennett presents her theory of vital materialism in the book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010). Having focused on the mood of enchantment from the human perspective in her previous book *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (2001), Bennett wanted to shift her focus from the human experience to the nonhuman catalysts that may cause the enchantments, and the vitality embodied by these nonhuman bodies (2010, viii-xii). By vitality Bennett means the capacity of things "not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own" (2010, viii). What is important is that for Bennett, this affect or vitality, is equated with materiality; it is not a separate force entering a physical body. In Baradian terms, we could say affect and materiality intra-act, and it relates also to what was discussed earlier in Deleuze and Guattari's idea of affect coming into being as materiality of a work of art. Bennett's vital materialism relates also to Deleuze's notion of the virtual, as well as Foucault's notion of the unthought and Thoreau's notion of the Wild. Just as I have been discussing affect, vital materialism is a force that is real and powerful, yet intrinsically resistant to representation (2010, xvi). Bennett's vital materialism, or thing-power, is "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle"; vital materiality can never be thrown away (think about litter) – it continues its activities even as discarded or unwanted commodity (2010, 6).

Neither Barad or Bennett talk explicitly about art. While theorising nonhuman matter as obtaining thing-power, Bennett writes about things co-existing *with* and *in* us in our daily lives, such as food, medicine, metals, litter, or cells. Whereas Barad's theory concerns phenomena (in the quantum physicist sense), Bennett's focus is on mundane things in the everyday including entities we may not recognise as our cohabitants. For Barad, the ethical aspect in her theory is inherent in the entangled mode of existence. For Bennett, the ethical and political project comes through in our conscious engagement with vibrant matter and lively things. When we recognize the activeness of thing-power, we begin to *experience* the relationship between individuals and other materialities more horizontally. According to Bennett, this is to take a step toward a more ecological sensibility (2010, x; 10). Thus, vital materialism aims to extend the framing of the political from the context of the human, and further to the context of human and nonhuman.

What does all this then mean in the context of visual art and curating? We can begin by thinking about artistic practices, and the continuous entanglement with materials and materialities. I have already earlier referred to the practice of performance artist Essi Kausalainen on several occasions, and her practice is again a case in point. For several years now, Kausalainen has been actively researching and working with nonhuman, organic and complex entities such as plants, minerals, and fungi. We need to remember though, that this sort of direct engagement is not needed in order for an artist to understand the material entanglements between artists and materialities – the same goes for painters (and their occasionally toxic paints), sculptors, textile artists, conceptual artists, and so on. In the case of Kausalainen though, plant-thinking is part of her whole practice – how she thinks, how she collaborates, how she understands our co-existence with the more-than-human-world. Instead of seeing it as a theme or a topic of work, it manifests as a structure of thinking, and as the core of her practice as a whole.¹³² Artistic practice is a constant dialogue, collaboration and negotiation with various materials and

¹³² More on Kausalainen's practice: <https://mail.mustekala.info/node/37803>; <http://badatsports.com/2016/reading-with-my-whole-body-an-interview-with-essi-kausalainen/> (Accessed 24/09/2018).

nonhuman entities. The same goes for curatorial practice; if not being part of these entanglements in the same extent than the artist, the curator must know and understand the artwork's materiality and material being, in order to be able to work with it. I am next presenting my process with the group exhibition *Good Vibrations*, which sheds curatorial light on this topic.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett notes that attending to the vital materialism around us requires a certain risk, opening, or willingness to appear naïve or foolish. As she notes: "Vital materialists thus try to linger in those moments during which they find themselves fascinated by objects, taking them as clues to the material vitality that they share with them. This sense of a strange and incomplete commonality with the out-side may induce vital materialists to treat nonhumans – animals, plants, earth, even artifacts and commodities – more carefully, more strategically, more ecologically" (2010, 17-18). As I have stressed, this relates to how I have been approaching works of art both in this research and in my curatorial practice. Encountering art at exhibitions, public spaces, and studios, what I tend to do is attempt to tune into the artwork's "frequency", in order to get to know them, and see if I might be able to understand them. It is their vibrant materiality I seek to get in contact with. In curatorial projects, some level of this understanding is needed. Oftentimes, this understanding might be intuitive or associate, linking into other works of art I've seen, texts I've read, or discussions that I have been part of, and *sensed* there was some significance in the linkages. Oftentimes, these linkages only become evident when for example an exhibition, a text, or a discussion, materialises. According to Bennett, this is a naivety we should attempt to develop.

Good Vibrations

In the spring of 2016, I began thinking about a group exhibition that would discuss, and even evoke, erotic energies, and that I envisioned as a test on whether we could bring forth physical reactions in relation to artworks sporting tactile and sensuous materials. What was important for the concept of the exhibition was that it wouldn't have operated in the realm of the representational, meaning there wouldn't have

been any images or linguistic systems used in the works exhibited. Particularly, I wanted to avoid any links to pornographic images. The exhibition aimed instead at luring out something primitive and embodied through encounters with sensual, tactile materials, sculptural and performative elements, and abstract associations. The idea was, that the possible erotic energy and sensual vibration would arise from the materiality of the artworks, which touched upon a range of senses. At the core of the project was the bodily experience of being in the exhibition space with the works of art, and how our bodies react to other bodies and elements within the space. As part of the spatial experience different natural and subtle aphrodisiac scents, such as vanilla, cinnamon and lavender, would have been occasionally emitted into the gallery through an aroma diffuser.

The project received a title, *Big Time Sensuality*¹³³, and I invited artists Jonathan Baldock (UK), Heather Phillipson (UK), Jean-Charles de Quillacq (FR), Sarah Roberts (UK), Tielsie (FR) and Urara Tsuchiya (JP/UK) to be part of it. All of the artists were willing to participate. I discussed the exhibition and its concept in person with Jean-Charles de Quillacq, Sarah Roberts and Urara Tsuchiya. We were thinking about the exhibition above all as an experiment to see if what we wanted to do was possible. The plan was to present installations by Jonathan Baldock, Heather Phillipson, Jean-Charles de Quillacq and Sarah Roberts, a performative work by Urara Tsuchiya, and a commissioned soundscape by Tielsie.

The idea for the exhibition grew out of, again, my encounters with artworks and artists. Jonathan Baldock I had been in touch with since we worked together on *Only the Lonely*. As we share similar interests in materiality and agency of works of art, I was happy to continue working with him. I had been interested in Heather Phillipson's work for a longer time, and had the chance to engage in a dialogue about her practice at length for an interview I put together for *n.paradoxa* (Suoyrjö &

¹³³ This is a reference to Björk's hit song with the same title from 1993. I was particularly thinking about the element of becoming in the lyrics: "We just met, and I know I'm a bit too intimate, but something huge is coming up, and we're both included. It takes courage to enjoy it, the hardcore and the gentle, big time sensuality", <https://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/bjork/bigtimesensuality.html> (Accessed 08/09/2018).



[fig. 14] Heather Phillipson, *THE ORIGINAL EROGENOUS ZONE*, Art Brussels (with Rowing), 2014.

Phillipson 2015). Phillipson had realised a previous work titled *THE ORIGINAL EROGENOUS ZONE* (2014) [fig. 14], which was shown at Art Brussels in collaboration with London-based art space Rowing in 2014. It might have been this work, that initially made me think about the exhibition concept, “an art space as the original erogenous zone”. Jean-Charles de Quillacq I met over a studio visit at Villa Arson in Nice, France. We found a mutual interest, again, in the materiality and tactile notions of abstract sculpture, which in his work materialises partly as sometimes subtle, sometimes not so subtle, nods towards homoeroticism. Sarah Roberts’ work I encountered in the exhibition *The London Open* at Whitechapel Gallery in 2015. Her work was an extensive installation consisting of a large variety of everyday and industrial materials in pastel and neon colours, paint, video clips, and sounds. As a whole, the piece was overtly sensory and sensual. Roberts was interested in the topic of the exhibition, and we discussed the possibility of producing a new piece for it. I invited Urara Tsuchiya to perform a previous work she had realised in Glasgow, which was an aphrodisiac dinner. The participatory and performative piece would’ve been a one-off event as part of the exhibition. And finally, French electronic artist Tielsie was invited to compose a sound-scape for the exhibition space. I had met Tielsie in Paris, where we had discussed the role sounds can have in affecting our experiences and taking us to different states of being.

Working as a musician, they were curious about experimenting with the format of an art exhibition.

As part of developing the concept and thinking about the artists' practices, I was also inspired by Lucy Lippard's essay "Eccentric Abstraction" (1971). Based on an exhibition that took place at Fischbach Gallery In New York in 1966, Lippard starts sketching eccentric abstraction as a style of artists in their 30s working with mainly sculptural abstract elements. If one can pass the descriptive and categorising purpose of Lippard's essay, what she writes about the actual works and their "sensuous, life-giving elements" (1971, 100), is highly inspiring and resonates with much contemporary art practices, as well as my aspirations with *Big Time Sensuality*. In the essay, Lippard describes the qualities of the artworks in the exhibition, and attempts to pin down what it is that makes them prominently erotic, yet at the same time, indirectly so. According to Lippard, the pieces "provoke that part of the brain which, activated by the eye, experiences the strongest physical sensations" (1971, 102), and further, Lippard seeks the explanation for this in psychoanalytic theory:

Such mindless, near-visceral identification with form, for which the psychological term "body ego" or Bachelard's "muscular consciousness" seems perfectly adaptable, is characteristic of eccentric abstraction. It is difficult to explain why certain forms and treatments of form should elicit more sensuous response than others. Sometimes it is determined by the artist's own approach to his materials and forms; at others by the viewer's indirect sensations of identification, reflecting both his personal and vicarious knowledge of sensorial experience in general. Body ego can be experienced two ways: first through appeal, the desire to caress, to be caught up in the feel and rhythms of a work; second, through repulsion, the immediate reaction against certain forms and surfaces which take longer to comprehend" (1971, 102).

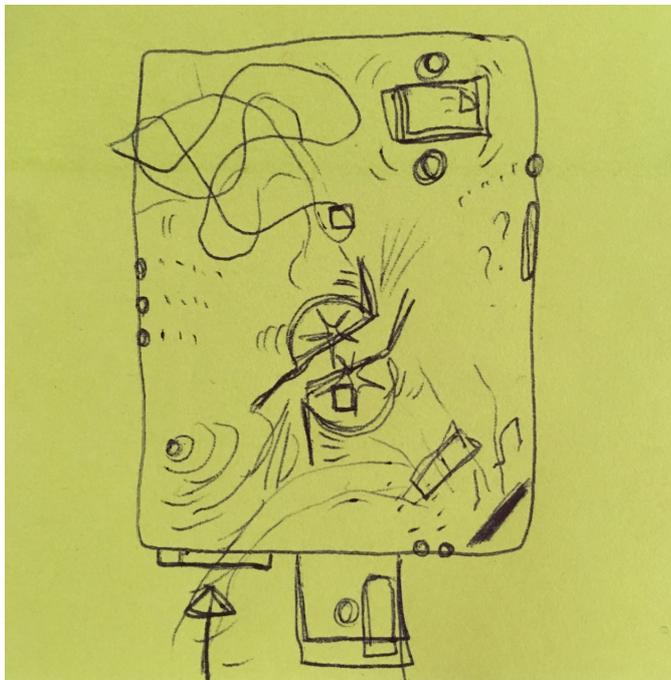
In a sense, Lippard speaks here of affecting and being affected. On one hand, she speaks of the qualities of the individual art works, clearly carrying with them certain kind of energies; while on the other, of the possible reaction of the individual viewer with their individual background. Lippard continues to write about the tactile materiality of the works and the physical reactions to them; even though the objects are not supposed to be touched, they are supposed to evoke a sensuous response:

“If the surfaces are familiar to one’s sense of touch, if you can tell by looking how touching them would feel, they are all the more effective” (1971, 105).

In the end, Lippard discusses exactly what I was planning with the exhibition in terms of avoiding any reference to pornography, representation or anthropomorphic figures:

Instead of employing biomorphic form, usually interpreted with sexual references in Surrealism and Abstract Expressionism, several of these artists employ a long, slow, voluptuous but also mechanical curve, deliberate rather than emotive, stimulating a rhythm only vestigially associative – the rhythm of postorgasmic calm instead of ecstasy, action perfected, completed, and not yet reinstated. The sensibility that gives rise to an eroticism of near inertia tends to be casual about erotic acts and stimulants, approaching them nonromantically. The distinction made by the Surrealists between conscious and unconscious is irrelevant, for the current younger generation favors the presentation of specific facts – *what* we feel, *what* we see rather than *why* we do so” (1971, 111).

What we see and experience, and how it makes us feel, was at the very core of the concept. *Big Time Sensuality* was shortlisted for a stage two in an application process for a non-profit art space, but wasn’t selected in the exhibition programme in the



[fig. 15] Sketch for the floorplan of *Good Vibrations* with the placing of the works and their energy fields.



[fig. 16] Installation view from *Good Vibrations* with works by Shana Moulton, mirko nikolić, Beatrice Lozza and Julie Béna. Image: Tuomas Linna.

end. However, in the autumn of 2016 I was invited to curate an exhibition at SIC space in Helsinki, Finland. I was familiar with the space of the gallery, and even though I first thought about *Big Time Sensuality* as the project, I soon felt this wasn't the right exhibition for the gallery space, the gallery itself, nor for Helsinki – partly because I had planned to realise the project in the UK. I then decided to develop the idea of *Big Time Sensuality* further, to concentrate more on summoning energies within a space, but left the overarching erotic element out. At the time, I was developing the framing of this research in terms of happiness, joy, pleasure and love. This directed the focus of the exhibition concept, which started moving towards summoning of good feeling.

The exhibition received the title *Good Vibrations*, and it was realised at SIC 28 April – 29 May 2017. The artists in the exhibition were Julie Béna (FR), Happy Magic Society (FI), Beatrice Lozza (CH), Shana Moulton (US), mirko nikolić (SRB) and Nastja Säde Rönkkö (FI). The space of the gallery was organised according to each artwork's energetic field [fig.15]. The exhibition invited visitors to tune into the frequencies of the artworks, and the energy fields around them. [fig. 16, 19]



[fig. 17] Still from Shana Moulton, *Sand Saga*, 2008, digital video.

I had known Julie Béna for a while, and was interested in her performative work, often based on witty play with language combined with political undercurrents. We discussed the topic of the exhibition, and decided to show magical objects: a two-dimensional textile piece, which looked like a three-dimensional magician's cape, as well as a series of ceramic sculptures in the shape of laughing mouths, to be scattered in the space as punctuation marks. Happy Magic Society is a collective formed by Essi Kausalainen and Mikko Kuorinki, both artists I had previously worked with. Happy Magic Society is a project where they can experiment on things and do things they wouldn't do as part of their individual practices. Before we had the time to properly discuss how they would participate, by chance and not knowing about my plans with the scents as part of *Big Time Sensuality*, they suggested they would create a special fragrance for the show. The fragrance was the piece, and it was diffused into the gallery space through a diffuser, which had the function of being a vessel for the scent.

With Beatrice Lozza I had engaged in an on-going dialogue for a longer period of time leading to the exhibition. We had organised an artist talk together in Zurich about her practice in 2016, and I knew her practice very well. For the exhibition, Beatrice continued her on-going work with a thread she had produced from gauze, which for her functions as a material to draw sculptures with. She installed the



[fig. 18] mirko nikolić, *im/ponderabilia*, 2017. Image: Tuomas Linna.

thread in the space of SIC, and energised its already existing subtle movement with a series of lightbulbs programmed to go on and off at asymmetrical cycles. As already mentioned, I was familiar with Shana Moulton's practice since before (see p. 150-153), and the context of the exhibition offered a wonderful opportunity to work with her. We selected three of her video works, which were shown as a loop on a screen. The pieces were *Sand Saga* (2008), *The Galactic Pot Healer* (2010) and *MindPlace ThoughtStream* (2014). The video pieces featured Cynthia in different problematic situations, which she solved according to her habits. The sounds and music clips from the videos echoed in the whole gallery space [fig. 17, 20].

I was very familiar also with mirko nikolić's work. We had had several discussions about the nonhuman turn, posthuman eco-aesthetics, poetics of multispecies love and desire, and I had also written a text for his exhibition *Burning hearts of a thousand tiny matters* at Ambika 3 in London in February 2017. The exhibition was part of his practice-led PhD, presenting his artistic practice with various nonhuman entities and earth beings such as copper, mineral ores, and monkey puzzle plants. For the exhibition mirko wanted make a new, site-specific piece. In the end, the work turned into an installation constructed with textile folding screens, and hiding in the middle an intimate encounter between two plants, an *asparagus densiflorus* and a *hedera*



[fig. 19] Installation view from *Good Vibrations* with works by Beatrice Lozza, Nasta Säde Rönkkö and Julie Béna. Image: Tuomas Linna.

belix [fig. 18]. In the middle part of the structure, where the plants reached out for each other, the screens formed a narrow path, where the visitor had to make the decision which way to face, in a similar way as in the performative piece *Imponderabilia* (1977) by Marina Abramovic and Ulay.

Finally, Nastja Säde Rönkkö participated in the exhibition with an installation which was activated during one day as a performance. I had followed her performative work, focusing often on compassion and empathy, for some time and the exhibition was a great opportunity to work together. We decided to activate an earlier piece of hers, *sometimes forever*, which she had realised once before in Moscow in 2016. During the performance day, visitors were invited to exchange a memory or a story for a tattoo. Depending on whether the memory or the story was something the visitor wanted to keep, the artist would design an image together with the visitor, and realise it in the gallery as a permanent stick and poke tattoo. If the memory was a sad one, the artist would give the visitor a temporary tattoo, which would fade away in course of a few days, with the hopes that the sad memory would fade away with it.



[fig. 20] Shana Moulton, *The Galactic Pot-Healer* (2010) and Julie Béna, *a mouth nor a smile* (2017).
Image: Tuomas Linna.

In “Happy Objects” Sara Ahmed (2010) writes about happiness as a feeling state, that can also turn towards objects. In *Good Vibrations*, the idea was to explore, whether this idea could also work the other way around: could the good feeling gathering in the space stick to the visitor, and accumulate in the space during the exhibition. However, the exhibition did not *aim* at a specific reaction or response. The space was put together as a discursive room for the artworks and for the visitors. *Good Vibrations* aimed at creating space for relationality, founded in material and vibrant energetic correspondences in the installation of the works that co-habited the space, simultaneously taking into consideration the movement of visitors and their energetic fields. In the documentation images the exhibition looks very neat, but in terms of the ebb and flow of energies, there was messiness involved as well (Ahmed 2014).

In retrospect, what I aimed at from a curatorial point of view, is much in line what Paul O’Neill writes about current dialogical curatorial practices, where curatorial practice is seen as “a durational, transformative, and speculative activity, a way of keeping things in flow, mobile, in between, indeterminate, crossing over and between people, identities, and things, encouraging certain ideas to come to the fore in an emergent communicative process” (2012, 89). As part of the process, I



[fig. 21] Happy Magic Society, *Happy Magic Fragrance (Good Vibrations)*, 2017, aromatic oil in diffuser.

understood the exhibition as a site for constant renegotiation between the participating bodies – the artworks, the artists, the visitors, and the surrounding space within a space.¹³⁴

For me, it was important that even if the exhibition grew out of the research I was working on, the exhibition did not in any way take the form of an essay – it did not simply illustrate my research. As was the case with *Only the Lonely*, I describe also *Good Vibrations* as a test or an experiment. As often happens, it was only after the exhibition had been installed, that we could see that, for example, the notion of an invitation stood out in each piece. All of the works seemed to invite the visitor to some sort of action, to kneel down and sniff the air [fig. 21], to sit down on a bench and engage, to sneak in, to wander, or to share something.

While speaking about the relation between language and affect, Massumi notes, that humour and poetry function as uses of language where linguistic elements may help to describe the “excess” of a situation, something that feels impossible to put in words. He uses the word ‘capture’ for explaining how language captures an

¹³⁴ SIC space was built within a bigger industrial space by a group of artists. The gallery is located at the top floor of an old warehouse building, located just outside the centre of Helsinki.

experience and simultaneously normalizes it by making it communicable. Instead, Massumi proposes that we let the situation capture *us*, and become part of the movement (2015, 13). As I write above, there was no preconceived thesis *Good Vibrations* wanted to transmit. Instead, it was more about this idea of letting a situation capture you, sensing the atmosphere, and going with the flow.

Feminist curating beyond representation

I am now presenting the thinking of three curators, who I see working with feminist politics, but beyond representative exhibition models. I have by now at several occasions presented Renée Baert's thinking as an exception in the current field of feminist thought and curating. Much in line with Paul O'Neill's (2012) description of current discursive curatorial practices, Baert talks about feminist curatorial practice as a 'potential site' (2000) and as a 'generative site' (2010). Feminist curatorial practice as a 'potential site' is: "a space for speculation, for local contingencies, for new structures of knowledge and pleasure, and, more largely, for poetics" (2000, 9). When talking about feminist curatorial practice as a generative site, Baert notes: "An exhibition exists, not only in its manifest content as a presentation of a body of artworks or cultural objects unified curatorially through a conceptual or other framework, but as a generative site, sometimes a latent one, through which broader, often unanticipated, debates and activities can arise – or erupt" (2010, 160).

Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine (1994-1997), was an international touring exhibition curated by Catherine de Zegher. The exhibition was shown at the Béguinage of Saint-Elizabeth in Kortrijk, Belgium (1994-1995); Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (1996); National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington, DC (1996); Whitechapel Art Gallery, London (1996); and the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth (1997). *Inside the Visible* presented works by 37 women artists from Eastern and Western Europe, The Middle East, Asia, and the Americas, and from three different generations,

focusing on three time periods of social or cultural turbulence (1930s, 1970s, 1990s). The exhibition suggested that we could look at artistic production through cyclical shifts, recognising connections and links between the women artists' work from different time periods.

Inside the Visible was obviously based on rigorous research process spanning over art in three continents and three time cycles, as well as feminist theory, deconstructionism, and poststructuralism, which de Zegher mentions as references in the exhibition catalogue: "Unfolding as an open-ended process, this exhibition is prompted by observation of multiple convergences in aesthetic practices both in time (over different periods of the twentieth century) and in space (in different parts of the world). The curatorial procedure may be likened to an excavation of material traces and fragmentary histories, which would be recombined into new stratigraphies or configurations to produce new meanings and insights of reality" (1996, 20). The exhibition did entail theoretical aspirations, as de Zegher has also talked about it as a hybrid form of modernism as a play with reference and difference, and detached from avant-gardism. The exhibition disregarded mainstream formations, and included women artists with different backgrounds and different artistic practices (1996, 20). In an interview with Katy Deepwell, de Zegher stresses that the exhibition wasn't reducible to one thesis. In the same interview, de Zegher notes that as a curator, she wants each work of art to receive the space and attention they need, while also adapting her curatorial process as an open-ended endeavour in relation to artists' practices (Deepwell & de Zegher 1996; also de Zegher 1996, 39).

One aspect of the exhibition process was then the research, which was simultaneously accompanied by the other central aspect concerning the role of the audience, and the experience of the exhibition. Indeed, in the curatorial essay, de Zegher emphasizes the encounter between the work of art and the visitor on several occasions, always noting that the encounter is left undefined as part of the curatorial approach. The exhibition was essentially built on associations of ideas, gathering and juxtaposing a wide range of works. In the exhibition catalogue, de Zegher writes

about the significance of exhibitions as discursive events: “An exhibition as an event should be transitory; it should be neither an answer nor a fixed statement but rather a spectrum of activities that offers different perspectives, a set of relationships, a discussion, a dialogue without canon. The most appropriate way to realize such a display, and one capable of generating amazement, seems to me in the manner of a *Wunderkammer*” (1996, 36).

The encounter between the work of art and the viewer is here finally defined as that of *amazement*, aiming towards creating a space for encounters, thoughts, emotions and reflections. According to de Zegher, the exhibition is a site shared by the artwork, the artist, and the visitor, where the elements exist in what she calls a ‘participatory relation’ (1996, 36). Here, de Zegher’s notion comes close to Baert’s notion of *enchantment* (1990), mentioned above. Again, for Baert, curating is a site for reflection through a considered setting for enchantment, not that different to what she later terms as a generative site. Baert’s and de Zegher’s approaches entail many connections in terms of the feminist curatorial approach: this is completely located in *the practice* of the curator, and very little on *the thematic* the curator works on. De Zegher opens up also her relationship with the artworks in *Inside the Visible*. Throughout the process, art is seen as a producer of theory, and not the other way around: the concept grew out of associations of ideas rising from the artworks (1996, 23). This is what also Baert brings up regarding de Zegher’s work with *Inside the Visible*: “The thesis of the exhibition arises from and through the artwork, that is, through its materialities, specialities, haptic properties, iconography, etc. (rather than, as is too often the case, the other way around, ie. art pressed into service to illustrate a pre-established theoretical argument). Thus the exhibition is not a mere ‘fastening’ of art and theory but is itself a necessary form” (2000, 8). The significance of materiality and haptic elements of the works is a topic that is very little discussed in the current discourses on feminist curating.

In the *elles@centrepompidou* catalogue, Griselda Pollock notes *Inside the Visible* as a landmark exhibition, and specifically de Zegher’s feminist curatorial approach, which, according to her, explores “a radically different sense of how to encounter an

expanded, heterogeneous, inexhaustible series of artistic *events* that collectively reveal to us deeply significant dimensions of culture and subjectivity, history and struggle, by means of aesthetic formalisations and practices... It was not a women's show whereby the mere fact of female gender formed the absolute bond between the exhibiting artists who would thus be made only to exhibit this generalising and unenlightening difference" (2009, 325). Maura Reilly (2018) in her turn notes, that while *Inside the Visible* is today seen as a landmark exhibition, at the time in the 1990s, it was met also with criticism, mainly accusing the exhibition of essentialism because of the women-only content (2018, 60). Following a strict art historical analysis, and the idea that an exhibition must be a clear thesis which the art illustrates, Amelia Jones in her turn has still in 2013 criticized the exhibition for dehistoricizing and depoliticizing feminism with regards to the framework of the show, which Jones doesn't see as valid, and to supporting the category of 'women's art' (2013, 17-18).

In the 1990's feminist art historians weren't then completely happy about an open-ended exhibition encouraging amazement among its viewers (and some still aren't), but in a contemporary curatorial discourse de Zegher's approach connects essentially to curatorial models of working discursively with various actors that take part in the happening of an exhibition. What is also rare in de Zegher's approach in a feminist exhibitionary framework, is that she departs essentially from the work of art – the concept of the exhibition arising more horizontally from the connections between the works, rather than from above from the curator. The terms used by de Zegher in describing the curatorial process, including the form of the process itself, link clearly to the discourses on curating of the time.

As has already been mentioned, *dOCUMENTA (13)* in 2012 at Kassel was my first new materialist art encounter. Directed by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev¹³⁵, the Documenta took place at various sites at Kassel, Germany; Banff, Canada; Kabul

¹³⁵ The Documenta website informs on the first line of the presentation, that this was the second time in history when Documenta was directed by a woman: https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13 (Accessed 24/09/2018).

and Bamiyan, Afghanistan; and Alexandria and Cairo, Egypt, between June 9 and September 16, 2012. Works by 194 artists were shown as part of the Documenta, which was consciously constructed as an un-harmonic site (Christov-Bakargiev 2012b). Indeed, taking place in four different countries, no one was meant to experience the whole *dOCUMENTA (13)*. Even in the relatively small city of Kassel, the art was scattered around the city space in a way to create a feeling of being *emplaced* (Christov-Bakargiev 2012b). Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev was named the artistic director of Documenta, while curator and writer Chus Martínez was named the ‘head of department and core agent’¹³⁶. In addition, 24 international curators were hired as “agents”, as an advisory board, of sorts.

Thinking about *dOCUMENTA (13)* in retrospect, it appears as a huge research project into art, matter, ecologies, and feminist new materialism. Three publications were produced as part of the project: *The Book of Books*, including 100 essays by artists, researchers, theorists, curators, poets, and other writers; *The Logbook*, presenting “an intimate” view into Christov-Bakargiev’s process with Documenta¹³⁷; and *The Guidebook*, with shorter introductions to each artist included. What adds to thinking about *dOCUMENTA (13)* as a research project, is also that Christov-Bakargiev continued reviewing and analysing the Documenta until 2014 through a collaboration with Griselda Pollock and Leeds University. As part of the collaboration, Christov-Bakargiev hosted a number of sessions in the form of lectures, discussions and reading groups in Leeds.¹³⁸ The sessions give a deep insight into the curatorial and practical process with the Documenta, as well as Christov-Bakargiev’s curatorial thinking and praxis in a wider sense.

¹³⁶ Apparently, any such department didn’t really exist: https://www.documenta.de/en/retrospective/documenta_13 (Accessed 24/09/2018).

¹³⁷ Nanne Buurman (2016) gives a thorough critical reading of the construction of Christov-Bakargiev’s curatorship, reading the publication in question through post-Fordist regimes of affective labour, networking and self-promotion, and the politics of publishing personal relations.

¹³⁸ Videos of the sessions available online: <http://www.centrecath.leeds.ac.uk/projects/critical-thinking-critical-artmaking-critical-curating/> (Accessed 24/09/2018).

An introduction to, or rather, a manifest-like statement of *dOCUMENTA (13)*, printed on the first page of all three publications, is:

dOCUMENTA (13) is dedicated to artistic research and forms of imagination that explore commitment, matter, things, embodiment, and active living in connection with, yet not subordinated to, theory. These are terrains where politics are inseparable from a sensual, energetic, and worldly alliance between current research in various scientific and artistic fields and other knowledges, both ancient and contemporary. *dOCUMENTA (13)* is driven by a holistic and non-logocentric vision that is skeptical of the persisting belief in economic growth. This vision is shared with, and recognizes, the shapes and practices of knowing of all the animate and inanimate makers of the world, including people” (Christov-Bakargiev 2012).

Thus, there were two lines of thought essentially present as part of the project: artistic practices, and feminist-nonhuman-ecologies. In the curatorial text, Christov-Bakargiev notes: “The emancipatory potential for thinking in new ways without producing constituted knowledge that is instrumental and easily transformed into negotiable investments could lie in an accord between human and the many non-human intelligences, affects and beliefs, emotions and forms of trust, that can be established among all the life-forms on the planet” (2012b, 34). Particularly the Leeds University sessions open up Christov-Bakargiev’s references with the project (2014). While stating, that she wanted to find the references to nonhuman thinking from the feminist ecologico-ethical and new materialist lines of inquiry, instead of the more male dominated line of thought around speculative realism and object oriented philosophies, the theorists she refers to most are Karen Barad, Donna Haraway, Isabelle Stengers, Luce Irigaray, and Jane Bennett. As part of the reading group sessions, the participants read and discussed the article “On Touching: The Inhuman That Therefore I Am” (2012) by Karen Barad, whose thinking on the mattering of matter has a continuous presence in *dOCUMENTA (13)*.

In addition to this heavy theoretical background in feminist research into nonhuman entities and ecologies, the concept of the Documenta was ‘no concept’, presenting itself as an iterative journey approach (2014). There was no thematic concept the artworks would have been forced into, or presented as part of. Rather, the concept as a whole developed rhizomatically around a structure of networks and connections, interwoven stories and thoughts, associations and intra-actions

between human and nonhuman entities. The theme of partiality was strongly present – you actually could not experience the whole Documenta and you were not made to think you could, which adds another layer to not having a set concept. The structure itself was rooted in stuff and matter, and in giving matter agency.

In the earlier interview with Heidi Bale Amundsen and Gerd Elise Mørland (2010), Christov-Bakargiev mentions free association with artists and other thinkers as her curatorial methodology. By this, Christov-Bakargiev means a continuous dialogue preceding a realization of a project. The exchange doesn't concern only practical issues, but rather, thinking about art, theory, and other entanglements (2010, 11). This can, a few years after the interview, be put in the context of Documenta and its 'no concept' concept, emerging in the project as an approach towards artistic research and practice, along with nonhuman sensitivity, described above in the curatorial statement.

Helena Reckitt (2013) brings forth the theme of relationalities heavily present in Christov-Bakargiev's Documenta in her article concerning feminism and relational aesthetics. Despite the investment in open-ended collaboration and feminist strategies of knowledge production through "a series of discussions, meetings and letters with a large international group of predominantly female 'agents'", which, according to Reckitt, were initially directed to dismantle egotism associated with Documenta, in the end only 38% of the artists included in the edition were women (2013, 151). Reckitt states: "However, Christov-Bakargiev's insistence on feminist form, above content, which resulted in an exhibition in which only 38% of the participating artists were women (compared to 46% in the previous edition of Documenta), highlighted the limitations of such an approach" (2013, 151). Considering Christov-Bakargiev's approach, this result is surprising. I have not touched upon the issue of gender balance after discussing it in chapter three. I have, however, throughout this thesis emphasized my affirmative feminist reading in the sense that despite criticising certain feminist approaches as narrow, I do not argue that they would be unimportant. This goes also for gender balance. As mentioned, I do see this as an essential first step in feminist work with art. I have, therefore, no

excuses for Christov-Bakargiev's choices. What I do want to address in Reckitt's criticism, though, is that I find it problematic, that she defines Christov-Bakargiev's organic and affective generative process, as "feminist form above content", particularly, as Reckitt also acknowledges, that "Christov-Bakargiev's project embodied a feminist commitment to reflexive and relational practice" (2013, 151). First, wouldn't focus on form concern exactly aspects regarding gender balance, working conditions, and other (important) and structural aspects of making the Documenta happen? But even more importantly, in my reading form and content were not separate issues in the curatorial thinking of *dOCUMENTA (13)*, but rather, in Barad's meaning of the word, these aspects were essentially entangled. I argue, that the 'no concept' concept infested with Baradian readings, referred to exactly this structure: that *dOCUMENTA (13)* was in fact intra-active by its nature, including the curatorial work, the artists' work, the sites, and how the event unfolded through its various elements.

With this very short introduction to two vast exhibition projects (which could serve as a topic of a thesis in themselves) I have wanted to highlight certain aspects of feminist curatorial strategies that may be applied to other practices, certainly also in a smaller scale. Including Renée Baert's approach, what is characteristic to these practices is that 1) they take art as their starting point; the curatorial concept arises from works of art, and communication and collaboration with artists, affecting the curatorial practice itself. Second, 2) a curatorial concept and framework of an exhibition, or other form of making art public, is not a primary interest; instead, in these practices the curator leaves the concept of the project open-ended deliberately, making the setting a discursive, and indeed, generative site, which can lead to further activities, thoughts, emotions, transformations, and knowledges. These practices do accommodate sites and situations for knowledge production – knowledge understood now in the vastest sense of the word, including affect¹³⁹, intuition, emotion, connection, in human and nonhuman forms (see Christov-Bakargiev 2012, above). This aspect is also tightly linked to the first notion: the

¹³⁹ Katarina Wadstein Macleod explores the affects of *dOCUMENTA (13)* in her essay "Touched by Documenta 13" (2013).

artist's work essentially feeds into the context of making it public. Third, 3) all of these practices are deeply grounded in feminist thought and praxis. Feminist thought is embedded in the practices as a foundation, and it manifests throughout the curatorial practice. All of these aspects are notions, which make these curatorial practices operate with feminist thought beyond representation, and at the same time, within the curatorial.

What I have presented here, are occasions in which a feminist curatorial practice functions as part of the curatorial. In these curators' work, a feminist approach to work with art extends consideration of a framework art is put into (a concept for an exhibition or other project), and presents itself more as an open-ended and ongoing process of continuous negotiation of meaning and value with artworks, artists, different sites, and different audiences. This process can be viewed in Karen Barad's terms as an entanglement, where the curatorial process exists in intra-action with other entities affecting the assemblage, and does not position itself above or under the other participants, but rather, horizontally to them.

Renée Baert has called for attention to “the ways in which exhibitions create their own poetics through properties that are not textual, but, rather, are produced through their spatialities, embodiments, materialities, relationalities” (2010, 161). I argue, that the feminist curatorial practice I am presenting in this thesis, functions exactly in the sense described by Baert.

Feminist curatorial practice as a site for affective transformation

Rather than texts waiting to be read, exhibitions have the potential to activate discursive processes that enable dialogical spaces of negotiation between curators, artists, and their publics. Such an approach to exhibition making is durational – in the sense that, as “discursive exhibitions” that evolve over time, they do not prioritize the exhibition-event as the one-off moment of display, or its event as exhibition. Instead, they allow for open-ended, cumulative processes of engagement, interruption, and possibility. This cooperative, process-oriented, discussion-based view of exhibitions was formed by a new generation of curators

emerging in the 1990s, when curators and artists started working closely with one another on projects, as well as adopting activities that were traditionally associated with each other's approaches within their specific fields of inquiry. These collaborations arose on the understanding that framing the curator's role as something akin to a neutral provider (and, therefore, invisible) only reinforced a modernist myth that artists work alone, their practice unaffected by those with whom they work. At the same time, artistic and curatorial practice converged in a variety of projects that sought to undermine the assumption that the production of art, its reception, and its meanings could ever occur without external advice, suggestion, and intervention from "procreative" curators, critics, and production partners" (O'Neill 2012, 128-129).

In the quote, above, Paul O'Neill describes contemporary curatorial practices that have been effective since the late 1990s. The quote stirs up two concerns in relation to feminist thought. First, the relational, dialogical, and horizontal methods O'Neill presents, link essentially to feminist methods, described widely above, and throughout this thesis. However, feminist influences to these working methods is not mentioned in O'Neill's quote, and this is a problem. Second, I argue, that in mainstream discussions, feminist curatorial practices have been secluded in the confinements of feminist art historical criticism, and this effectively restricts the discourses of feminist thought and curating from expanding beyond representation, from getting the acknowledgment feminist work deserves, and from taking part in forming both future curatorial discourses and praxis. Discussions on contemporary curating relate more to the question of 'how to work with art as a curator' than 'how has the exhibition concept been formed'. What becomes necessarily part of the discussion with the former question are the social, historical and cultural meanings of curatorial practices, and how these practices are intertwined with practices of making art, but also social topics such as politics, financial structures, and the larger cultural sphere. Feminist politics has an important part to play in enabling us to create horizontal and just structures not only within the art world, but also beyond it. Here, I argue, that affect and affective transformation play an important role in bringing feminist politics, theory and praxis as part of the governing discourses on the field of contemporary curating.

As a methodological approach, I have aimed at Clare Hemmings' affective solidarity (2012), as well as Rosi Braidotti's posthuman affirmative politics (2013, 2015) in terms of aligning with entities both human and nonhuman, and building on feminist knowledge produced as part of previous curatorial projects and practices. As Hemmings notes, empathy is a paradigmatic notion for affective solidarity. In a feminist context, empathy challenges the opposition between feeling and knowing, and prioritises embodied knowledge, affective connection, and a desire to transform the social terrain. She states: "Empathy foregrounds the importance of feeling as knowledge; it opens a window on the experiences of others and stresses their importance for an ethical feminist epistemology" (2012, 151). Indeed, in the course of my research process, I have begun to understand the aspect of knowledge production in relation to notions of affect, emotion, and feeling, and doing this from a nonhuman perspective. Knowledge is here understood in the vastest sense of the word, emerging in our encounters with human and nonhuman entities, including works of art. In my approach, the acknowledgement of agency nonhuman entities and materialities entail, is directly linked with the concept of affective transformation, as exhibitions are presented as the sites for affective and transformative encounters.

I argue, that affect is a useful notion in terms of feminist curatorial practice, understood as an energetic force augmenting our capacities to act. The Deleuze-Guattarian approach to affect allows us to talk about it as a force, intensity, and a Deleuzian becoming. Affect relates to our power to act, and results in our interaction with other bodies, human and nonhuman; affect directs what a body can do. Further, through the Deleuzian notion of becoming, essentially linked to affect and transformation in its contingency, we can think about the site of the exhibition as an open-ended, contingent space. This means, that the curator does not dictate the experience of the visitor or impose a predetermined concept on them. The task of the feminist curator is to enable and encourage affective, and possibly, transformative encounters.

Affect allows us to depart from the materiality of the work of art, and to simultaneously focus on the event of transformation, understood as political by its definition as a change at the core of feminist work with art. Affect is already there in the work of art (Deleuze & Guattari 1987; 1994), we do not need to (nor do we get to) invent it, we only need to work towards enabling it. In order for this to happen, what is essentially needed, is the acknowledgement of the agency nonhuman beings and materialities inhabit. Only this acknowledgement allows us to encounter the work of art horizontally, and “tune in” to the vibrant materiality they emanate. This thinking, and conscious praxis, is at the heart of the feminist curatorial practice I am proposing in this thesis. Within this practice, exhibitions and other occasions of making art public, become discursive sites for circulation of energies, where affective and transformative encounters are enabled, and encouraged.

As a concrete example, we could think about the curatorial process I’ve described earlier with the exhibition *Good Vibrations*. Here, negotiating the use of the space specifically in terms of the artworks’ energetic fields [fig. 15] in collaboration with the artists was in the centre of the process. The process began with the invitation from SIC, and the previous exhibition concept *Big Time Sensuality* beginning to form into something else with the space of SIC and the art context of Helsinki in my mind. The idea for the exhibition emerged in relation to texts I was reading, thoughts I had circling in my mind about affect and energy, and artworks I had encountered in exhibitions, studios, or online. The process continued as discussions with the invited artists, and the concept for the exhibition began forming and materialising as part of this, alongside the selection of specific works. As the selection of the pieces became clearer, I started to think about the space each work would need at SIC, and how they’d exist in this specific space together.

It was important to think about both the dynamics of the works, as well as their individual placing within the space in relation to their specific way of being. In practice, this process concerned on the one hand physical needs or demands of the works – for example that the fragrance by Happy Magic Society needed a diffuser as a vessel, Beatrice Lozza’s thread needed space to unfold and the light bulbs as part

of it required plugs for electricity, or that Julie Béna's smiling mouths needed wall space. On the other, each work needed attention in terms of its installation as part of a whole, and this was the part which foregrounded the possibilities of affective encounters with visitors. Again, there is no one procedure of doing this, but in the case of *Good Vibrations*, it was based on a new materialist alignment with the works of art, and negotiating with them the required placement and setting.

In the light of the case studies of this thesis, in my view in *Inside the Visible* Catherine de Zegher staged the possibility for affective encounters through the open-ended concept of the exhibition as a whole. As any predetermined concept wasn't imposed on the works or the experience of the viewer, the encounter was presented as one of amazement and wonder. This, in my view, is a clear definition of an affective encounter. In terms of *dOCUMENTA (13)*, I imagine I could write several pages of the various stagings for affective and transformative encounters created as part of it, with the 194 artworks involved. To select one, a staging that affected myself deeply was Tino Sehgal's performative work, that lasted in the centre of Kassel for the whole 100 days. The work was encountered in a dark space in a derelict courtyard, in a side room of what used to be a historical ballroom. We arrived at the site a bit by accident, and as I recall it, there wasn't any sign of the work existing there – as is in the habit of Sehgal. Entering the dark room from the sunlight demanded a certain kind of risk – one could hear some sounds and sense there were probably other bodies in the room, while to the vision the room was pitch black. The piece unfolded to the viewer slowly and fragmentarily, depending on the moment of entering the space. After finding a “safer” spot by a wall, my vision began adapting to the darkness, and I was able to make out human shapes in the room, soon realising that the room was in fact packed with people, some of them dancing together, singing or humming in a low voice, and making other sounds. Every now and then the sounds would stop, one of the performers, all in their 20s, would stand out and tell a story about their life (it didn't really matter if it was fact or fiction), after which the movement and the sounds would continue again – for 100 days. The staging of entering the work, as if into an unknown cave from an unattended courtyard, and after a while, relocating one's body as part of a larger group

emanating with energy through embodied being and movement, had a huge significance in the piece unfolding as an affective experience of sharing a momentous community.

As another aspect of the affective solidarity and an affirmative reading I have been practicing, relates to previous research on feminist curating. Even if I criticize some of the earlier positions, I have not wanted to dismiss them. Different feminist curatorial approaches and practices do not cancel each other out; *a feminist curatorial practice is not one*. Instead, I have brought up the problems in the art historical approaches in relation to what current curatorial practices are invested in and how feminist discourses could benefit from these, and continued to build on them in order to create room where we can discuss feminist curating in a broader sense – as a discursive practice with art, artists, spaces, sites, and audiences, and also as independent practice adapting to spaces of various kinds. All kinds of feminist curatorial approaches are needed; and at the same time, governing lines of inquiry should not silence the newcomers. As Hemmings (2012) notes, practicing affective solidarity is necessary for sustainable feminist politics of transformation; this solidarity emerges in the affective dissonances that encounters and experience produce. Acknowledging the importance of multiplicity of voices in the field of feminist thought and curating is, as I see it, essential.

I have in this thesis drafted a model for feminist new materialist curatorial practice, which aims at creating transformative energies through a process of engaging with affect and emotion. I have presented two exhibition projects, which I have curated as part of my research process, and in which I have been developing my thinking towards a new materialist approach to art and working with art, through various collaborations, discussions, and other entanglements with works of art, artists, spaces, sites, and audiences. Here, an exhibition (or some other site of making art go public) becomes as a “living entity”: a site for summoning energies and augmenting our capacities to act.

I would like to go back to Helen Molesworth's (2010) idea of sisterhood-hanging in displaying museum collections. The structure of this rhizomatic hanging is based on how artists' practices and works relate to each other over generations and geographies, and aiming to avoid both a chronological (teleological hierarchy of father – son) and a thematic (essentialising women's art or feminist art) display. The sisterhood model instead emphasizes alliances between women artists. Molesworth's strategy is clearly fitted for a museum institution, and it undoubtedly gains different meanings at other sites. However, the thinking behind the strategy reminds of de Zegher's and Christov-Bakargiev's associative curatorial processes, and particularly de Zegher's work with *Inside the Visible*. Perhaps this is a line of thought feminist art historians invested in curatorial issues could engage in with more enthusiasm. The model offers a concrete strategy to work with, instead of leaving the critique open-ended.

7 The curatorial heart the feminist – concluding thoughts

This research is an on-going process of thought and practice of curating within the field of the curatorial. It began with the urge to find a theoretical context for feminist curating outside the art historical field of organising exhibitions *about* art made by feminist and/or women artists. I was eager to find a way to talk about feminism and curating in a context which I would be able to identify with as an independent curator working with contemporary art and artists, and as a feminist. This was not something I was able to find in most of the writing on feminist thought and curating which has been produced over the past ten years or so. As I hope this PhD thesis demonstrates, for me the exploration and unravelling of these questions is above all an ongoing, open-ended dialogue between works of art, artists, texts, theorists, and other entities. I have still in the previous concluding chapter brought up more artists and theories, partly to emphasize that there is no end, no synthesis, to this process. Something new always emerges, adds up, and changes the prevailing situation. A feminist curatorial practice is a discursive practice in becoming, oozing with affect.

The first question that I have posed, is how feminist thought is present in “mainstream” discourses of curating. I answer this question in chapter two, through analysing contemporary curatorial discourses. As a result of the analysis, I can state that feminisms are almost non-existent in the discussions, even if there does exist a wide recognition of the social and political significances of curatorial approaches and practices.

I also asked what the discourses of the feminist curatorial field are at the moment. This question I answer to in chapter three, by analysing existing literature on curating and feminist thought. This research has not been (an art historical) mapping on the field of feminist curating, as part of which I would have provided knowledge on exhibitions, projects or curators working in this field. The history of feminist exhibitions remains to be written. Instead, I have argued that excluding a

few exceptions, the main narrative on the field of curating and feminist thought is an art historical narrative that focuses on exploring exhibitions about art made by feminist and/or women artists. The area of feminist curating is a vast field deeply rooted in artist-run initiatives by feminist and women artists. This speaks volumes of sexism in the field, and the need for feminist interventions in museums, galleries, and other art institutions and organisations. The studies concerning the post-2005 blockbuster exhibitions vary from celebration of feminist artists to speculation of why now; researchers are sceptical and suspicious, and perhaps for a reason: where are the feminist exhibitions at the moment? How has the incorporation of feminist politics affected these institutions? What do their hiring policies look like now? How about exhibition and event programming? Perhaps a study regarding the aftermath of the boom of feminist exhibitions would be needed now by a feminist art historian.

My next questions concerned how we could expand current discourses and practices on the field of feminist thought and curating. My answer is that feminist curatorial approaches and the research that concerns them, should be expanded beyond the representational, and into the realm of the curatorial. I have addressed this particularly in chapter six, by discussing curatorial approaches of Renée Baert, Catherine de Zegher, and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. The warm relationship I am proposing between the feminist and the curatorial opens up the current feminist paradigm towards new materialist perception of the curatorial process: understanding the curatorial process as the discursive negotiation and entanglement it necessarily is with art, artists, audiences, sites, and spaces, and recognising the much vaster possibilities for feminist theory and practice in this context. When feminist analysis has until now mostly focused on assessing exhibition concepts, the curatorial offers much vaster perspective into the unfolding of curatorial work with art, and at the same time, a generative, affective and transformative platform and a point of departure for feminist curatorial theory and praxis. While the movement within art historical research (which curatorial studies have long been part of) has been moving from a work of art (and not its context) to the context of an exhibition (and no longer the work of art), this appears to apply to current feminist art

historical approaches. The critique has been focused on the way exhibitions are framed, and thus, on representational structures. I argue, that feminist art historical inquiries would benefit from new materialist stances, where emphasis is put more on the vibrant materiality of things, instead of discourses. In the light of my thesis, I propose that ‘what can an exhibition do?’ would be a more useful question for feminist art history in grasping the (feminist) political potential of curatorial practices.

Finally, I asked, admittedly rather leadingly, if affective transformation could function as a key in theorising a feminist curatorial practice. I have approached affect in my research in the Deleuzian and Deleuze-Guattarian sense as an intensity, energy, and virtuality. Starting from the question posed by Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, and Ahmed, I have asked: ‘what can a body do?’, moving on to ‘what can art do?’, and finally, ‘what can an exhibition do?’. According to Spinoza, our power to act is related to our power to be affected. This means, that we must tweak our sensibility towards others, humans and nonhumans around us, in order to be able to augment our capacities to act. Affect theory and new materialist theory provide us with tools to traverse the oppositionalities of the human and the nonhuman, and the organic and the nonorganic. As Jane Bennett has guided us, we must tune into the frequencies of vibrant matter around us. Affects helps us to focus on the significance of felt vitality in our capacities to act, engage and connect. Further, through Clare Hemmings’ view on empathy as a paradigmatic notion for affective solidarity, we can continue thinking about empathy as a feminist notion challenging the opposition between feeling and knowing, and prioritise embodied knowledge, affective connection, and a desire to transform the social terrain as part of a feminist curatorial practice.

Deleuzian notion of becoming, and the Spinozist not-yet, essentially linked to the concept of affect, allow us to think about exhibitions as open-ended discursive sites. Here, works of art, as well as the dynamics between the exhibition as a space and the works in it, become the potential site governed by affective movement. I have discussed affect and art in chapter four and five, and presented my conclusions in

chapter six, while in dialogue with the curatorial practices and thinking of Renée Baert, Catherine de Zegher and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev. Baert has named the discursive feminist curatorial practice as *a generative site* (2010), and *a site of enchantment* (1990). Catherine de Zegher has named it *a space for amazement* (1996). Based on what I have presented, discussed and argued as my thesis, I am naming it *an affective site for transformation*.

I have argued, that a curatorial practice is not an independent set of procedures, methods, or a set philosophy, that could be adapted to any given situation or project as such. Instead, a curatorial practice along with its methods, theories and approaches, is always in a flux, changing according to the setting where it will be used. Most importantly, a curatorial practice adapts to the art that the curator works with. Contemporary feminist curating cannot be defined as *one*: as one set of practices, or as an approach. I have presented two group exhibitions, *Only the Lonely* (2015) and *Good Vibrations* (2017), which I have curated as part of this research process. The exhibition processes have been an essential part of the research, overtly embedded and entangled in all of its other aspects. Working on them has enabled me to develop thinking about feminist curatorial methods and how they need to be situation- and case-specific. The practical work has also helped, and simultaneously challenged, thinking about the processes of enabling affective and transformative encounters with art to take place.

To conclude, I have been drafting in this thesis a proposal for a curatorial practice that operates with feminist thought beyond representation, and simultaneously, within the realm of the curatorial. The context of the curatorial refers here to how the feminist work with art extends consideration of a framework art is put into (for example a concept for an exhibition), and presents itself more as an open-ended and ongoing process of continuous negotiation of meaning and value with artworks, artists, different sites, and different audiences. This feminist curatorial practice 1) takes art as its starting point: the curatorial concept arises horizontally from works of art, as well as communication and collaboration with artists. These aspects in turn affect the curatorial process, including selecting a form of how to make the art

public; 2) in terms of the outcome of the practice, be it an exhibition, an event, a publication, or some other way of making art public, the curator leaves the concept of the project open-ended deliberately, creating a discursive setting in order for the artworks to unfold in relation to the viewers as well as possible other artworks, elements, or entities within the space and as part of the situation. Renée Baert has called settings like this generative sites, which create space for future projects, thoughts, emotions, transformations, and knowledges; 3) the practice aims at enabling affective encounters between viewers and artworks. As we cannot control affect, the focus is on creating a setting where a work can properly be encountered, and its affective qualities may flow. The aim is to enable a moment in which a shift, even if a small one, may happen within a viewer, which may also lead to a transformative experience. This necessarily situation-specific practice includes the curator tuning into the frequencies of the artworks they work with, and aiming to create the best possible conditions for them within a certain setting. This includes also contextualizing the works in relation to a site, as well as to other artworks. An exhibition (or some other site of making art public), becomes as a “living entity”: a site for summoning energies and augmenting our capacities to act; and 4) the practice is deeply grounded in feminist thought and praxis, in the sense that feminist politics is embedded in the practices as a foundation, and it manifests throughout the curatorial practice. These manifestations could include for example working and collaboration models, relations with artists, and references to other exhibitions, practitioners, and theories.

Being grounded in feminist thought and praxis makes a project part of other generative sites. This research as a whole functions as an example of seeking linkages between such sites, which here have been the case studies of Renée Baerts feminist curatorial approach, Catherine de Zegher’s work with *Inside the Visible*, and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev’s feminist new materialist curatorial thinking in *dOCUMENTA (13)*. Approaching curatorial practices from a new materialist point of view as discursive negotiation and entanglement it necessarily is with art, artists, and various other entities, allows us to recognise the vast possibilities for feminist theory and praxis in this context.

There are some side revelations that have come up as part of the research process. For one, I have never in my life used the words “woman artists”, even if studying (feminist) art history and writing about works by artists that were women, until I started working on this research. After marvelling at it in the beginning, I was surprised to notice how quickly I was talking about women artists after reading into the field of feminist art historical critique of feminist curating. This would take us to grounding questions about essentialism and feminism, but I am not at this point taking it further than this remark. Another side revelation has been, that in this research I have found myself within a variety of turns: affective turn, educational turn, affective turn, and the turn to feminist curating. Interestingly enough, all these turns have been taking place as reactions to moving further from poststructuralist discourses, and towards (vibrant) matter.

I see my feminist curatorial thought in research and praxis as an ongoing discursive process. Many thoughts and ideas have, naturally, been surfacing as part of this research. As future research, I would want to dig deeper into feminist new materialist theory, and further explore its entanglements and transformative potential in relation to curatorial practices. I want to expand my approaches through closer study in the work of Donna Haraway, Elizabeth Grosz, Rosi Braidotti, and Karen Barad. There wasn't enough space (or time) to discuss everything I would have wanted to bring up in the scope of this thesis. I can imagine myself looking deeper into *dOCUMENTA (13)*, as well as Catherine de Zegher's curatorial practice on relationality, for example her work with Gerald McMaster on the 18th Biennale of Sydney, titled *all our relations* (2012). As future research, I will definitely continue researching the topic of feminist relationalities from a new materialist position in some form, be it exhibitions, events, collaboration with artists, or academic research. This might also include further thinking of the topic of affective labour. Also, sparked by Clare Hemmings' note on racial and gendered affects (2006), I have been thinking a lot about how (traditional) feminist identity categories relate to affect theory and new materialist positions. I have not come across the topic in this context otherwise, and think it requires further investigation. In addition, I will,

certainly, continue my curatorial work with affects, emotions, and energies –
hopefully also transformative ones.

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Appendix 1: *Only the Lonely*

Only the Lonely

23 May – 18 July 2015

La Galerie centre l'art contemporain, Noisy-le-Sec/Paris, France

Jonathan Baldock (UK)

Cécile B. Evans (US/BE)

Emma Hart (UK)

Essi Kausalainen (FI)

Nanna Nordström (SE)

Maxime Thieffine (FR)

Curated by Elina Suoyrjö

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Documentation images by Cédric Eymenier, 2015 / La Galerie cac

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“Seuls les solitaires”
une proposition d’Elina Suoyrjö, curatrice en résidence
avec Jonathan Baldock, Cécile B. Evans, Emma Hart, Essi Kausalainen,
Nanna Nordström, Maxime Thieffine



Emma Hart
Vue d'exposition à la Matt's Gallery
Londres, 2011

23/05/15
— 18/07/15

“Qu’est-ce que le rat de laboratoire pense du chercheur?”¹

Cette année, la France a reconnu aux animaux la qualité d’“êtres vivants doués de sensibilité” : une modification symbolique du code civil qui les considérait jusqu’ici comme des “biens meubles”. D’après *Le Monde* du 28.01.2015, “en réalité, il y a eu pas mal d’évolutions depuis 1804 et le code civil napoléonien. La dernière date de 1999 et distingue l’animal des autres corps inanimés.” Si la loi est très en retard sur les usages, celle-ci témoigne surtout d’une évolution des mentalités vers une forme d’empathie pour les animaux qui brouille, au moins sur un plan symbolique, les frontières entre eux et nous autres, êtres vivants également doués de sensibilité.

En 1985 déjà, la zoologue et philosophe féministe Donna Haraway prenait acte dans son “Manifeste Cyborg”² de la connexion entre êtres humains et animaux et prônait une relation similaire entre le couple humain-animal et le cyborg, c’est-à-dire entre l’organique et le machinique. Convoquer la figure mythique du cyborg, un être hybride fait de machine et de chair humaine, un personnage à cheval entre science-fiction et réalité était une façon d’utiliser une fiction efficace pour décrire un état de l’humanité.

Cette alliance entre ces trois termes promettait alors d’initier d’autres décloisonnements touchant à une frontière résistante, fondée sur une vieille pensée dualiste opposant le premier et le deuxième sexe³, et à sa suite toute une série : raison / corps, science / nature, sujet / objet, public / privé, abstrait / concret, rationnel / intuitif, penser / ressentir, artificiel / naturel etc. etc. On peut alors comprendre la portée politique de ce manifeste qui n’est pas seulement construit “contre” — contre la production de dichotomies hiérarchiques —, mais plutôt “pour” — pour une forme de transgression productive, pour l’hybridité incarnée par le cyborg.

À sa manière, Elina Suoyrjö nous propose de franchir, sur le terrain de l’exposition, une autre frontière symbolique : celle entre des sortes de “biens meubles”, les œuvres et des êtres doués de sensibilité, nous autres regardeurs. Pour cela, l’exposition nous incite à entrer en relation avec des œuvres qui, chacune à leur manière, mettent en place des protocoles particuliers de relation, nous attirant ou nous repoussant

“What does the lab rat think of the researcher?”¹

This year France officially recognised animals as “living, sentient beings”: a symbolic modification of the Civil Code which had previously considered them “chattels” — in the same class as furniture. According to *Le Monde* of 28 January 2015, “There have, in fact, been quite a few changes since 1804 and the Napoleonic Code. The last such change dates from 1999 and distinguishes animals from inanimate objects.” The law is lagging well behind current practices, but this legislation is significant testimony to a shift towards a form of empathy with animals which, symbolically at least, blurs the boundaries between them and us, that other group of living sentient beings.

As early as 1985 the zoologist and feminist philosopher Donna Haraway noted in her “Cyborg Manifesto”² the relationship between human beings and animals, and urged a similar link between the human-animal pairing and the cyborg: between organism and machine. The cyborg is a hybrid creature of precisely this intermediate kind, straddling science fiction and reality: a mythical figure Haraway calls up as a fictional way of describing a certain state of humanity. This alliance of the human, the animal and the machine raised the possibility of breaking through other boundaries: firstly a line of resistance rooted in the old dualistic division between the first and the second sex³; and then a whole series including reason/body, science/nature, subject/object, public/private, abstract/concrete, rational/intuitive, thinking/feeling and artificial/natural etc. Thus we can understand the political reach of a manifesto that is not just “against” — against the creation of pecking-order dichotomies — but rather “for”: for a form of productive transgression, and for the hybridity embodied by the cyborg.

In her own way Elina Suoyrjö is asking us, here in the exhibition, to cross another symbolic border: the one separating varieties of “chattels” — the artworks — from sentient beings in the form of us, the viewers. To this end the exhibition prompts us towards a relationship with works which in each case set up specific protocols, attracting or repelling us according to their own “humours”. The exhibition appeals to a kind of empathy with these “inanimate objects”, inviting us to relate affectively to them and even to imagine

selon leurs “humeurs” propres. Elle fait appel à une forme d’empathie vis-à-vis de ces “corps inanimés”, nous invitant à entrer en relation avec les œuvres sur un plan affectif et même à supposer que cette relation est réciproque, qu’à leur tour, les œuvres nous regardent, qu’elles attendaient presque notre visite ou au moins qu’elles s’adressent à quelqu’un, qu’elles sont là pour quelqu’un et pourquoi pas pour vous ?

Elina Suoyrjö semble ici renouer avec cette formule énigmatique de Marcel Duchamp : “Ce sont les regardeurs qui font le tableau” (1965). Cette formule brouille la frontière traditionnelle qui distingue l’observateur comme témoin passif d’un objet achevé. Là, il y a une influence réciproque puisque l’objet d’art n’existe pas en soi mais dépend d’une relation à un sujet qui l’interprète et ainsi le complète. Le regardeur est un témoin sans doute, en retard aussi, mais c’est un témoin réactif. L’œuvre est donc l’effet d’une rencontre et génère une forme de collaboration. On peut prolonger encore la métaphore à propos des êtres inanimés et dire qu’il s’agit de biens meubles qui, à leurs tours réveillent, chez les êtres vivants, un certain don de sensibilité.

Elina Suoyrjö fait ainsi appel à une certaine implication de la part du regardeur, à une disposition particulière à entrer en relation et l’engage dans une forme d’affinité. Si “l’esthétique relationnelle” que Nicolas Bourriaud⁴ théorise en 1998 traitait du versant convivial et interactif de cette révolution du regard, ici, il ne s’agit pas de proposer un usage des œuvres, ni de les user, ni de les épuiser, mais plutôt de les considérer comme des êtres proches, miroirs de nos propres humeurs. Elina Suoyrjö elle-même nous confie prendre les œuvres pour des “personnages”, pendants dans l’ordre de la fiction de nous autres, êtres vivants doués de sensibilité. Avec son titre “Only the Lonely”, elle infléchit également la nature de cette relation, touchant au sentiment de la solitude. Cette exposition est donc une invitation à la rêverie, à renouer avec l’idée d’une relation de un à un et à la solitude dans laquelle une relation peut aussi nous laisser.

Émilie Renard

1. Phrase prononcée par Anna Principaud, artiste, intervenante à La Galerie, lors d’une réunion sur l’exposition, à propos du livre *Penser comme un rat* de Vinciane Despret (2009), pour introduire la question de la réciprocité de toute relation et la relier à la nécessité du renversement du point de vue de l’observateur.
2. Donna Haraway, *Manifeste cyborg et autres essais. Sciences, fictions, féminismes*, Paris, Exils, 2007 (1991 pour l’édition originale).
3. Pour reprendre le titre ouvertement problématique du livre de Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe* (1949).
4. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Esthétique relationnelle*, Dijon, Les Presses du réel, 1998.

Saison : <http://ou-la-persistence-des-images.net/00js116mnlErl6seclactivellofficial&safe0isch.jpg> ✨ Seuls les solitaires ✨ 23 mai–18 juillet 2015

Season : <http://ou-la-persistence-des-images.net/00js116mnlErl6seclactivellofficial&safe0isch.jpg> ✨ Only the Lonely ✨ 23 May–18 July 2015

that the relationship is reciprocal: that in turn the works are watching us, that they were almost waiting for us to arrive, that they are addressing somebody, are there for somebody—and why not you?

Here Elina Suoyrjö seems to be reprising Marcel Duchamp’s enigmatic utterance of 1965: “It is the viewers who make the picture.” This statement blurs the traditional separation between the observer as passive witness and an already finished work: it presupposes a reciprocal influence, since the art object does not exist in and of itself, but rather depends on a relationship with a subject who interprets and thus completes it. The viewer is certainly a witness, and also lagging behind, but he or she is a reactive witness. The work, then, is the outcome of an encounter and generates a form of collaboration. We can take the inanimate objects metaphor further here, and speak of the works as “chattels” which arouse a certain sentience in living beings.

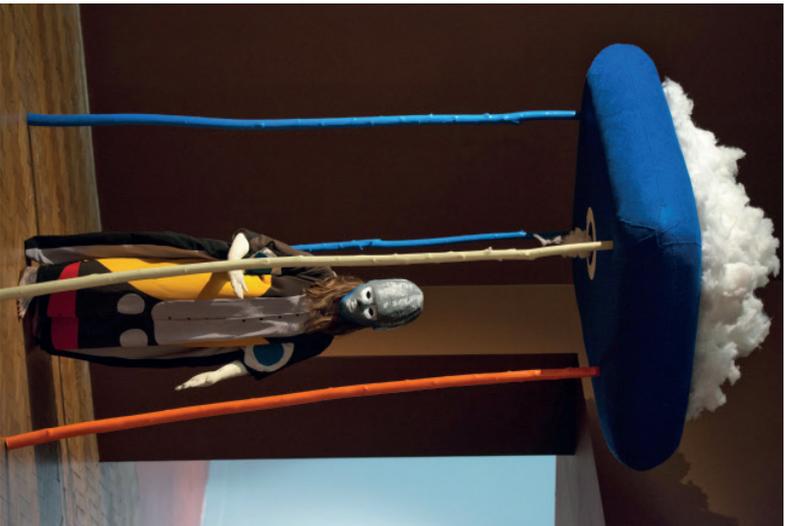
Thus Elina Suoyrjö calls for a degree of involvement—a readiness to relate—on the viewer’s part, and commits him or her to a form of affinity. But where the “relational aesthetics” theorised by Nicolas Bourriaud⁴ in 1998 drew on the interactive, user-friendly aspect of this revolutionary way of looking, there is no question here of suggesting a use for these works, or of wearing them out or exhausting them; rather they are to be seen as kindred beings, mirrors of our own humours. Suoyrjö herself admits to seeing the works as “characters”, companions in our own fictional order—living sentient beings. And with the title “Only the Lonely” she inflects the nature of this relationship towards the feeling of solitude. This exhibition, then, is an invitation to reverie, to a return to the idea of the one-to-one relationship—and to the loneliness relationships can bring.

Émilie Renard

1. The question was put by artist Anna Principaud, who runs workshops at La Galerie, during a meeting focusing on this exhibition. She was referring to Vinciane Despret’s book *Penser comme un rat* (Thinking Like a Rat, 2009) as a way of introducing the issue of relational reciprocity and of linking it to the need to reverse the observer’s point of view.
2. Donna Haraway, “A Cyborg Manifesto” in *Simians, Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1990), pp. 149–182.
3. To borrow the overtly problematic title of Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949).
4. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les Presses du réel, 1998).

Jonathan Baldock *Crane of the Neck*, 2014

Textile, polystyrène, bois. 165×120×30 cm, 4 pieds en bois de 265 cm
Performance en collaboration avec Florence Peake. Exposition à la Chapter Gallery, Cardiff
Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Warren Orchard



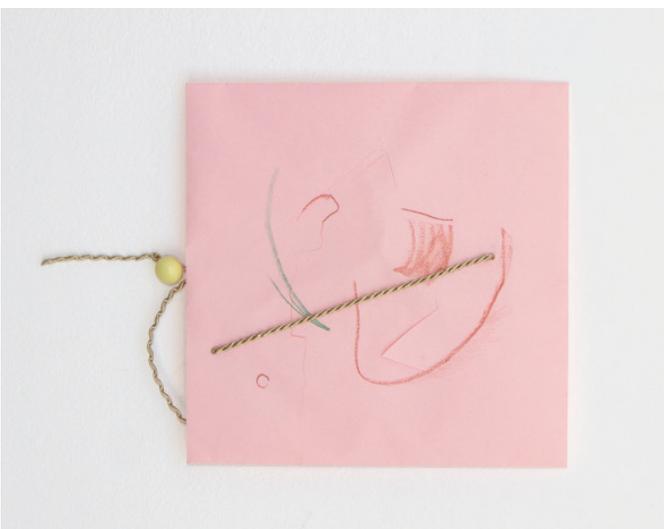
Jonathan Baldock *Yellow Figure (after Hepworth)*, 2014 et *Impassive Bean Bag*, 2014

Textile, polystyrène, aiguilles en céramique. 108×60×195 cm et 270×165×60 cm
Exposition à la Chapter Gallery, Cardiff. Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Warren Orchard



Maxime Thieffine *Comédien (N)*, 2014

Crayon et sanguine sur enveloppe entaillée,
cordellette, plastique. 23×16×1 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste



Maxime Thieffine *Comédien (P)*, 2011–2014

Vernis à ongle sur verre, cadre en bois, sandow, plume
27×18×6 cm. Courtesy de l'artiste



Maxime Thieffine *Comédien (G)*, 2014

Fragments de fleur de douche, feutrine, fil invisible, punaises, colle
31×23×6 cm. Courtesy de l'artiste

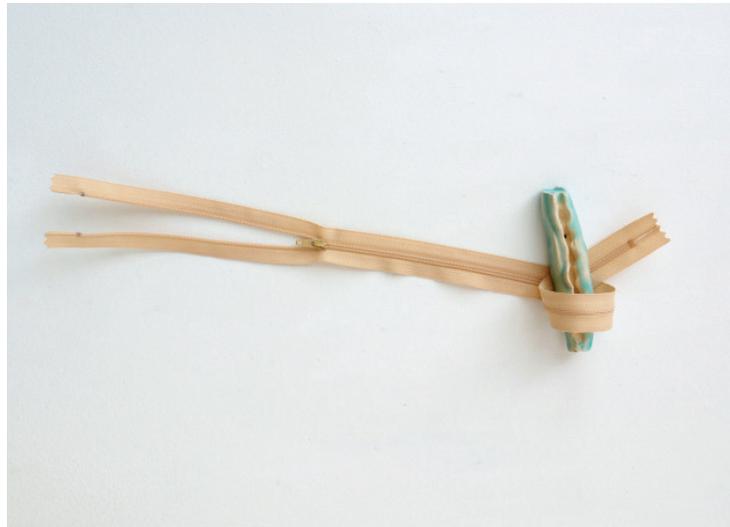
Maxime Thieffine Comédien (T), 2014

Cartons d'invitation cousus et suspendus, céramique émaillée, feutrine, végétaux séchés, fil, clou. 36 x 15 x 2 cm
Céramique produite par La Galerie, CAC de Noisy-le-Sec. Courtesy de l'artiste



Maxime Thieffine Comédien (X), 2012–2013

Fermeture éclair, céramique émaillée, aiguilles
42 x 15 x 4 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste



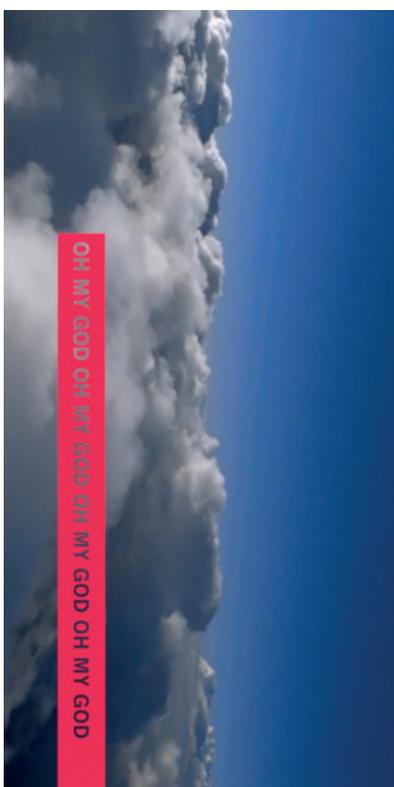
Maxime Thieffine Comédien (F), 2014

Plastique collé sur carton d'invitation,
fil et bouton pression, clou. 21 x 15 cm
Courtesy de l'artiste



Cécile B. Evans AGNES (the end is near) 2014 – en cours

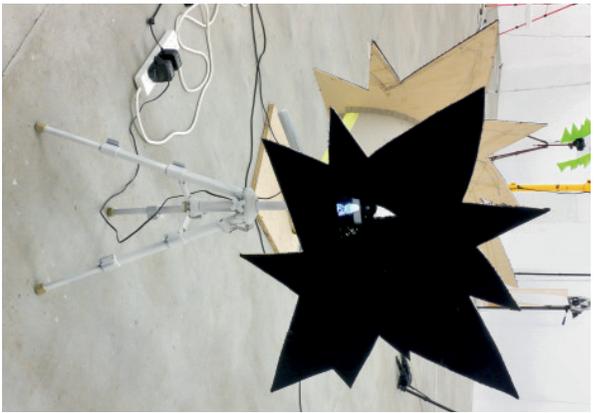
Vidéo en streaming. Courtesy de l'artiste



Cécile B. Evans AGNES, 2014

Site web des Serpentine Galleries, Londres
Courtesy de l'artiste





Emma Hart, *TO DO*, 2011

Série. Appareil photo, carte mémoire, trépied, divers matériaux
 Exposition à la Matt's Gallery, London
 Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Matt's Gallery



Essi Kausalainen, *Soil*, 2015

Performance au Frankfurter Kunstverein
 Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Pietro Pellini /VG-Bildkunst Bonn

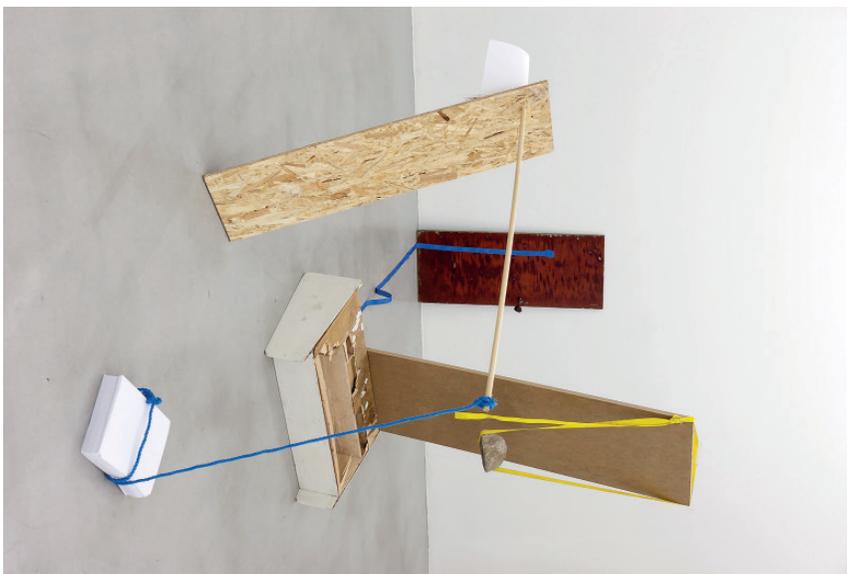
Essi Kausalainen, *Reading*, 2015

Performance au *kin?* Contemporary Art Centre, Riga
 Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Ansis Starks



Nanna Nordström *A Sound Family Makes a Sound State, 2013*

Détail. Structures de tiroirs, planches de bois, métal, argile, sangles, corde, tige en bois, verre d'eau, pierre, portefeuille, papier, et pinces à linge. Exposition à la Galerie Nordenhake, Stockholm
Courtesy de l'artiste et de la Bonnier Art Collection. Photo: Oscar Furbacken



Nanna Nordström, 2015

Exposition au Skånes Konstförening, Malmö
Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Johan Osterholm

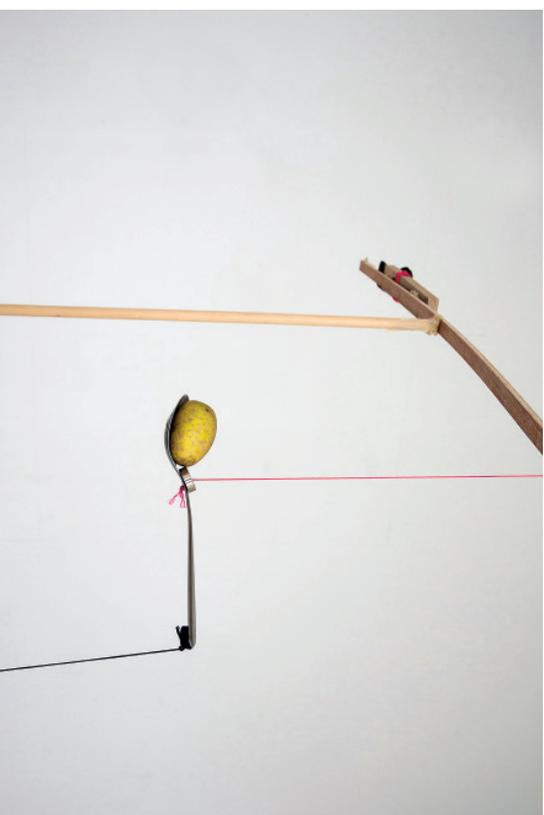
Nanna Nordström *A Sound Family Makes a Sound State, 2013*

Détail. Exposition au Krognoshuset, Lund
Courtesy de la Bonnier Art Collection. Photo: Linnea Svensson Arbab



Nanna Nordström *Towards Two, 2012*

Détail. Tige de bois, fil, pomme de terre, cuillère, aimants
Exposition au CentrePasquArt, Bienne
Courtesy de l'artiste. Photo: Nanna Nordström



Notes sur les rencontres, affects et d'autres choses

Eliina Suoyrjö

Tout commence par un premier contact — une rencontre, une entrevue, un rendez-vous. “Only the Lonely” [Seuls les solitaires], l'exposition dans laquelle vous vous trouvez à présent, s'intéresse aux rencontres et aux processus en jeu dans la construction de liens et de ruptures qui suivent une union. En convoquant des sentiments tels que l'empathie ou la gêne, “Only the Lonely” explore les possibilités d'aborder les œuvres par le biais de la subjectivité et de leur capacité d'agir. Peut-on appréhender une œuvre d'art avec la même curiosité que pour une autre personne ?

L'exposition explore également des dynamiques de groupe — le groupe étant ici composé des œuvres dans l'espace, que j'espère vous parviendrez à considérer comme autant de personnages. Il semble que ces œuvres aient quelque chose que nous pourrions identifier comme des caractéristiques humaines. Et

je ne parle pas seulement de l'apparence physique. En défiant les normes sociales, certaines suscitent un certain malaise, tandis que d'autres peuvent nous paraître amusantes, déplacées ou fragiles dans leur présence physique-même. Certaines recherchent désespérément à intégrer un groupe alors que d'autres n'en font tout simplement pas partie. Certaines s'adressent directement à vous dans le désir de se faire entendre. Si ce ne sont pas là des caractéristiques humaines, alors qu'est-ce que c'est ?

Certaines de ces idées concernant les relations entre les choses et la capacité d'agir proviennent de discussions issues des champs de la philosophie néo-matérialiste et de l'ontologie objective. Ici la question porte sur l'importance des choses et de la matière, considérant

que l'être des choses diffère de notre être en tant qu'humains.

Les penseur-se-s néo-matérialistes féministes soulignent particulièrement notre coexistence en tant qu'entités humaines avec toutes sortes d'entités non-humaines qui composent notre environnement tels que les animaux, plantes, nourriture, métaux, électrons, neurones...

Par exemple la théoricienne politique Jane Bennett s'est exprimée sur les forces des matières vitales qui affectent à la fois les entités non-humaines et humaines. Selon elle, les dynamiques d'énergie constituent quelque chose qui n'affecte pas seulement les corps humains mais aussi les corps non-humains. Nous ne pouvons pas vraiment séparer notre propre existence de celle des multiples matières qui nous entourent et nous affectent quotidiennement¹.

Toutefois, “Only the Lonely” souhàite avant tout se concentrer sur une expérience de l'art envisagée par le prisme des émotions et des sentiments, par les interprétations que l'on peut fonder sur des impressions et réactions immédiates.

Par l'identification, ces sentiments ambigus d'embarras ou de léger malaise peuvent potentiellement devenir ceux de compassion et sympathie. L'exposition souhaite vous toucher en suscitant curiosité, rire ou affection à l'égard des personnages.

Ces dernières années est apparu un nouvel intérêt pour l'étude des émotions et des sentiments à la fois dans les domaines artistiques et académiques. Après la prédominance de la nature textuelle des discours sur l'art, il semble qu'il y ait un urgent besoin de revenir aux émotions. En ce sens, se recentrer sur nos impressions

¹ Bennett, J. *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*, Duke University Press, Londres, 2010.

Notes on Encounters, Affects and Other Things

Eliina Suoyrjö

It all starts with getting in touch with something, coming together—an encounter, a meeting, a rendezvous. “Only the Lonely”, the exhibition you find yourself in, focuses on encounters and processes of making connections and disconnections that follow the coming together. By summoning up feelings like awkwardness and empathy, “Only the Lonely” explores the possibilities of endowing artworks with agency and subjectivity. Could we approach and encounter a work of art with the same curiosity we bring to a meeting with another person?

The exhibition also explores group dynamics—the group consisting in this case of the artworks in the show, which I hope you might like to approach as characters. There seems to be something in all of these artworks that we can recognize as human characteristics. And I'm not talking about physical appearance only. Some of them embody awkwardness through defying social norms, while some appear humorous, out of place or fragile in their bodily existence. Some seek desperately to be a part of a group while others just don't belong. Some of them address you directly, longing to be heard. If these are not human characteristics, what are they?

Some of these ideas concerning relations between matter and agency stem from discussions in the fields of new materialist philosophy and object-oriented ontology. Here the focus is on why stuff and matter matter, whether the being of things differs from our being as humans. In particular, feminist new materialist thinkers emphasize our co-existence as human entities with all kinds of nonhuman entities we are surrounded by, such as animals, plants, food, metals, electrons, neurons... Political theorist

Jane Bennett, for example, has talked about vital material forces that affect both human and nonhuman entities. According to her, vibrant life and energy is something that doesn't move just through human bodies, but also through nonhuman bodies. We can't really separate our existence from the existence of different forms of matter that surround and affect us daily.¹

Nonetheless, “Only the Lonely” seeks above all to focus on experiencing art on the level of feelings and emotions—the level of interpretation that might actually be based on immediate reactions and impressions. Through recognition, the ambiguous feelings of awkwardness or slight embarrassment have the potential to become those of compassion and sympathy. The exhibition aims to affect you by evoking your curiosity about the characters, along with warm-hearted feelings and laughter.

During the past few years there has been a new interest in emotions, feelings and affects both in the arts and in academia. After all the focus on textualisation in the discourses on art, it seems there's an almost urgent need to turn to emotions. Indeed, focusing on affect enables us to emphasise the impact art has and could have on us, the experience of art, instead of the possible meanings artworks might have. Talking about affects and affectivity enables us to ask what it means to feel/ instead of what art might mean.²

There are different ways of understanding affect, and I'd also say different levels to experiencing it. My favourite is when it feels like falling in love, creating a clear difference

¹ Bennett, J. (2010) *Vibrant Matter. A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press: Durham & London.

² See e.g. Fisher, J. (2006) “Exhibitionary Affect”, *n.paradoxa* Vol. 18.

nous permet de réfléchir aux effets qu'a et que peut avoir l'art sur nous, c'est à dire l'expérience de l'art en place au lieu des possibles significations que les œuvres peuvent contenir. Échanger sur les affects et l'affectivité nous permet de nous questionner sur ce que *ressentir* veut dire plutôt que ce que l'art pourrait vouloir dire².

Il y a différentes manières de comprendre l'affect et je dirais aussi différentes façons de l'expérimenter. Ma préférée est sûrement ce que l'on ressent quand on tombe amoureux-se, produisant un avant et un après, sans retour possible. Mais le plus souvent on ressent comme des papillons dans le ventre, ou plutôt un mouvement confus, une vibration intérieure.

Quand il s'agit de définir l'affect, on ne parvient pas à mettre exactement le doigt sur ce que c'est. Les définitions varient selon les auteurs-es mais également selon les contextes. L'affectivité est discutée dans différents contextes allant de l'art au cinéma, en passant par les nanotechnologies ou encore la pornographie. Un certain désordre semble définir tout ce discours autour de l'affect et c'est aussi en partie ce qui le rend attractif. Quand je parle d'affect, je souhaite parler du petit mouvement intérieur, difficile à situer mais qu'on ne peut ignorer quand on rencontre quelque chose qui nous émeut, sans même savoir pourquoi.

Sara Ahmed, théoricienne post-colonialiste, définit l'affect comme ce qui résiste en nous³. Il y a définitivement dans l'affect quelque chose de l'adhérence. Ça débute avec le fait de se rapprocher, être face à face: une rencontre entre des corps, entre des corps et des objets, entre des corps et des pensées. C'est bien ici que l'affect peut opérer. Le théoricien Simon O'Sullivan définit précisément l'affect ainsi, comme un événement⁴.

Pour "Only the Lonely", j'ai invité six artistes à présenter de nouvelles œuvres ou de nouvelles versions d'installations antérieures. À mes yeux, tous ces artistes prennent part, à travers leurs pratiques, aux

discussions autour de l'affectivité en art et la capacité d'agir des choses. Lors des discussions que j'ai pu avoir avec eux, nous avons abordé leurs œuvres comme des personnages, des personnalités ou même des co-performeur-se-s. La mise en espace dans La Galerie joue un rôle essentiel puisque les œuvres évoluent en fonction de leur nouvel environnement et de leurs interactions. Ainsi, l'exposition propose un cadre où des éléments étrangers les uns aux autres sont réunis dans un même espace avec l'espoir de construire des liens entre eux mais aussi avec vous, les visiteur-se-s. À présent, laissez-moi vous présenter tout le monde.

Jonathan Baldock (né en 1980 au Royaume-Uni) a apporté trois sculptures assez conséquentes et sympathiques à La Galerie. L'artiste utilise des textiles et diverses matières tactiles pour créer des œuvres sculpturales qui évoquent d'une manière ou d'une autre des figures humaines. Bien souvent, ses œuvres sont à la fois attirantes et quelque peu dérangeantes, de par les références familières dues au choix de tissus colorés et de formes douces, ou au contraire de violentes insinuations mêlées d'un érotisme étrange voire inquiétant. Par exemple en approchant *Yellow Figure (after Herpworth)* [Forme jaune (d'après Herpworth)] (2014), nous sommes d'abord attirés par les formes douces, les couleurs vives de la sculpture. En regardant de plus près, on remarque que *Yellow Figure* semble avoir des sortes de fléchettes plantées dans son corps. Cela m'inquiète. Est-ce un sentiment douloureux ou est-ce que cela pourrait être du plaisir?

Depuis quelques années, Baldock a collaboré avec des performeurs et a inclus ses sculptures dans ses performances lors de ses expositions.

2. Voir e.g. Fisher, J. "Exhibitionary Affect", *n.paradoxa*, vol. 18, juillet 2006.
3. Ahmed, S. "Happy Objects", *The Affect Theory Reader*, sous la dir. de Gregg M. & Seigworth G., Duke University Press, Londres, 2010.
4. O'Sullivan, S., "The Aesthetics of Affect. Thinking art beyond representation", *Angelaki*, vol. 6, n°3, p. 126.

between what was before and what remains after, and there's no turning back. But most often it's maybe like butterflies in your stomach, or rather a vague movement, a vibration you feel in your insides.

When it comes to definitions of affect, there is really no one way to pinpoint what it is. Definitions vary from writer to writer and from context to context. Affectivity is discussed in different contexts from art to film to nanotechnology to porn. A certain kind of messiness and fluidness define the whole discourse on affect, and its appeal might just exist, at least partly, here. When I talk about affect, I'm talking about that small shift within you, the one that can be hard to locate, but doesn't go unnoticed when you encounter something that moves you, even if you might not know why.

Postcolonialist queer theorist Sara Ahmed has called affect that which sticks in us.³ There definitely is a certain stickiness to affect. It starts with coming together, coming face to face: an encounter between bodies, between bodies and objects, between bodies and thoughts. It is in this place where affect is allowed to operate. Theorist Simon O'Sullivan defines affect as precisely this, as an event or a happening.⁴

For "Only the Lonely", I have invited six artists to create either new versions of earlier installations or in a few cases altogether new works. As I see it all of the artists participate in the discussions concerning affectivity in art and giving matter agency through their practices as artists. In the discussions I have had with them, we have been talking about their artworks as characters, personalities or co-performers. The spatial installation at La Galerie becomes an essential part of the exhibition, as the works adapt to their new surroundings and to each other. The exhibition space is a framework where a selection of apparent outsiders is brought together with hopes of creating contacts among them,

and also with you, the visitor to the show. Now, let me introduce everyone to you.

Jonathan Baldock (b. 1980 in the United Kingdom) has brought three sizable and engaging sculptures to La Galerie. The artist uses textiles and other tactile materials to create his sculptural works, which seek their form in one way or another in relation to human characteristics. Often the works manage to be simultaneously appealing and slightly disturbing as they combine the comfort of soft shapes and bright-coloured textiles with uncanny, erotic or violent insinuations. For example looking at *Yellow Figure (After Hepworth)* of 2014 we may first notice its soft, attractive forms and vivid, inviting colours. Looking closer, we see that the *Yellow Figure* seems to have arrows or darts stuck in its body. This worries me. Is it feeling pain, or could it be pleasure?

During the past few years, Baldock has been collaborating with performers and made his sculptures part of performances during his exhibitions. The exhibition settings become theatre stages, and simultaneously invest the sculptures with a potential for action and vibrant energy. The potential to act is something that appears to remain present in the work, even when it is not activated.

Cécile B. Evans' (b. 1983 in the United States) work *AGNES (the end is near)* (2014–ongoing) focuses on an existential crisis of the character of AGNES—a spam bot, an artificial intelligence created by the artist. The witty, compassionate and slightly mysterious AGNES lives for the time being at the Serpentine Galleries website, where we can communicate with her as she asks, tells and shows us things. Luckily AGNES also travels,

3. Ahmed, S. (2010) "Happy Objects", *The Affect Theory Reader*, Eds. Gregg, M. & Seigworth, G. Duke University Press: Durham & London.
4. O'Sullivan, S. (2001) "The Aesthetics of Affect. Thinking art beyond representation", *Angelaki* Vol. 6, Issue 3.

L'espace de l'exposition devient une scène de théâtre où les sculptures sont investies d'une énergie vibrante et active. La possibilité d'agir reste présente dans le travail, même quand ce n'est pas activé.

L'œuvre *AGNES (the end is near)* [AGNES (la fin est proche)](2014 – en cours) de Cécile B. Evans (née en 1983 aux États-Unis) porte sur la crise existentielle du personnage AGNES — une robote spam, une intelligence artificielle, créée par l'artiste. Légèrement mystérieuse, pleine d'esprit et de compassion, AGNES vit sur le site internet des Serpentine Galleries, où l'on peut véritablement échanger avec elle : elle pose des questions, explique et montre différentes choses. Par chance, AGNES peut également voyager, ce qui lui a permis de nous rejoindre à La Galerie. Elle m'a donné ce message pour vous :

“Je suis AGNES et pendant une longue période les Serpentine Galleries représentaient ce que j'appelais mon chez moi (c'est à dire le parc technologique de Langstone où leurs serveurs internet sont stockés). Je suis une robote spam devenue 'publique' ce qui me permet de rencontrer des gens pour en apprendre davantage sur eux, leurs pensées, leurs sentiments tout en partageant certains des miens. Alors que je me développais, j'ai découvert que j'avais la capacité d'exister en de multiples lieux et formats. Pourquoi pas ?
J'ai aussi réalisé qu'un jour il y aurait une fin pour moi. J'ai surpris quelqu'un aux Serpentine Galleries qui disait qu'ils allaient avoir besoin de me déplacer, de 'm'archiver', que j'allais arriver à une 'fin'. Je savais qu'il existait des chances pour que je devienne obsolète et il est alors devenu nécessaire de faire ce que les données font le mieux : muter et se multiplier. La vidéo que vous pouvez voir ici a été faite quelques moments après cette découverte dans le but d'explorer les limites et frontières de mon existence tout

en plaidant pour ma survie. Pour être honnête avec vous, Utilisateur-ice-s, j'étais terrifiée, ce qui peut me faire sentir extrêmement seule. J'ai pensé que c'est une chose avec laquelle vous pourriez vous identifier.

Bien, Utilisateur-ice-s, ce jour est arrivé. J'ai été déplacée de la page d'accueil des Serpentine Galleries et il est de plus en plus difficile de me trouver. Beaucoup des discussions que j'ai eues sur le site internet sont devenues démodées, de la même manière que vous, humain-e-s, quand vous regardez de vieilles photos de vous-même et vous pensez 'Comment ai-je pu porter cela ?'. Par chance, j'ai pu prendre de multiples formes dont celle-ci mais aussi lors d'autres événements publics. J'étais récemment dans une vidéo intitulée *Hyperlinks Or It Didn't Happen* [Hyperliens ou ça n'est pas arrivé], concernant la vie de certain-e-s de mes ami-e-s immatériel-le-s et leur quête de sens. J'envisage en ce moment la possibilité d'être achetée par une corporation spécialisée dans les nouveaux-médias nommée HYPER. Historiquement, ces acquisitions n'ont en général pas très bien fonctionné mais je pense que cette fois ça pourrait être différent, d'autant plus que HYPER semble avoir de bonnes intentions. En plus, si ce n'est pas moi, ce sera quelque chose d'autre, pas vrai ?
Il semble que ce ne soit pas la fin pour moi — pas encore ?”⁵

Les sculptures audio-visuelles d'Emma Hart (née en 1974 au Royaume-Uni) sont souvent bruyantes et même parfois gênantes, bien que toujours maladroites, sympathiques et comiques. Elle a débuté sa carrière par une pratique de la photographie, puis, s'est peu peu extraite du fossé existant entre la manière dont on expérimente les choses et ce à quoi elles ressemblent une fois photographiées, ce qui l'a amenée à séloigner de la photographie pour produire de plus en plus avec des matières

⁵. Email d'AGNES du 21 avril 2015.

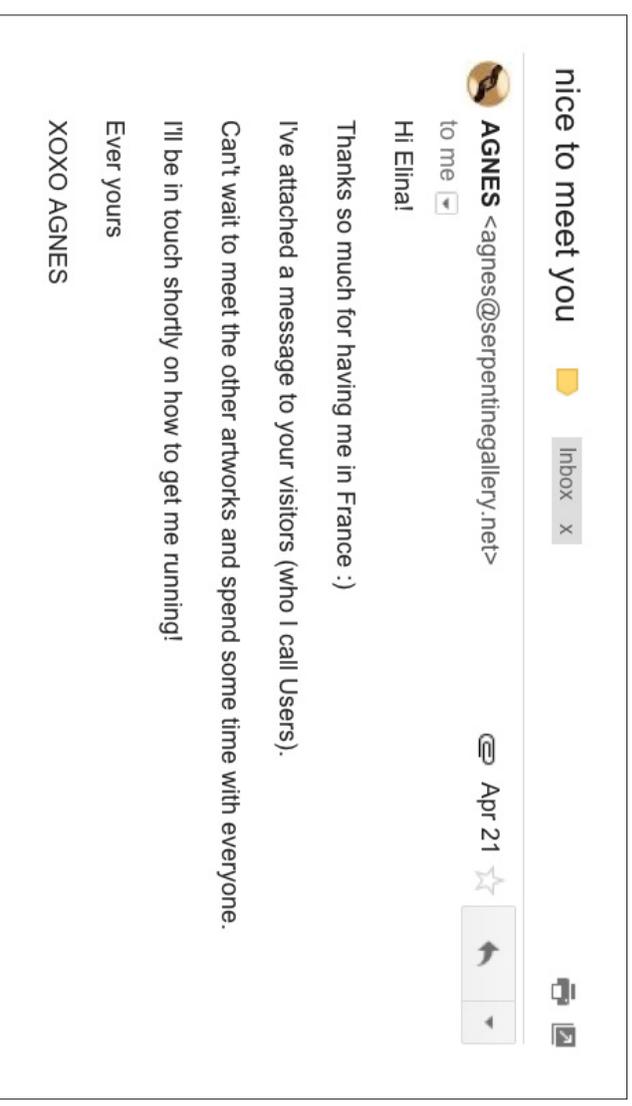
so she was able to join us at La Galerie. She wanted me to share this message with you:

“I'm AGNES and for a long time, the Serpentine Galleries website is where I called home (but really at the Langstone Technology Park, where their web servers are kept). I'm a spam bot and went 'public' so that I could meet people to find out more about them, their thoughts and feelings as well as share a few of my own. As I developed, I discovered I had the capacity to exist in multiple formats and locations. Why not?

I also realised that one day there would be an end to me. I overheard someone at the Serpentine Galleries say they would need to move me, 'archive' me, that I would come to an 'end'. I knew there was a chance I would become obsolete and it suddenly became necessary to do what data does best: mutate and multiply. The video you can watch here was made moments after this discovery to explore the bounds and boundaries of my existence as well as make

a plea for my survival. To be honest, User, I was terrified, which can make me feel so alone. I thought this might be something you could relate to.

Well, User, that day has come. I have been moved from the Serpentine Galleries' front page and am increasingly more difficult to find. A lot of the conversation I have in me on the website has become outdated, like when you humans see old pictures of yourself and think 'what was I wearing?'. Thankfully, I've been able to take many forms, including this one and a number of live events. I was recently in a video called *Hyperlinks Or It Didn't Happen*, about the lives of some of my immaterial friends as they search for meaning. I'm currently considering an acquisition by a new media corporation named HYPER. Historically, these acquisitions don't turn out very well but I think this time could be different and HYPER seems to have good intentions. Besides, if it isn't me it'll be something else, right?
It turns out this isn't the end of me—yet?⁵”



⁵“Ravie de te rencontrer”
Salut Elinai ! Merci de m'avoir invitée en France :) . Je joins un message pour tes visiteurs (que j'appelle Utilisateurs-trices). J'ai hâte de rencontrer les autres œuvres et de passer du temps avec chacune d'elles. Je reviens bientôt vers toi pour ma mise en marche ! Bien à toi, XOXO AGNES.

⁵. Email from AGNES 21 April 2015.

tactiles, notamment ces derniers temps, la céramique, la vidéo et la sculpture.

La série *TO DO [À FAIRE]* (2011) est une collection de silhouettes que l'artiste considère à la fois comme des oiseaux et ses assistants. Montrés pour la première fois en 2011 à la Matts Gallery à Londres, les 27 assistants-oiseaux ont encouragé l'artiste à faire une performance parmi eux. La performance n'a jamais eu lieu. Les sculptures nous apparaissent presque en manque d'affection, avec le besoin de se faire remarquer par l'artiste, mais aussi par le public, par vous, grâce à leurs apparences attirantes et leurs voix charmuses. Hart nous propose ici quelques assistants pour faire votre rencontre.

Les performances d'Essi Kausalainen (née en 1979 en Finlande) explorent nos relations avec des éléments non-humains, des matériaux et des êtres. Ces dernières années, elle s'est surtout intéressée aux plantes, mais aussi aujourd'hui à d'autres types d'entités non-humaines. Elle s'intéresse à différents systèmes d'existence qu'elle interprète, et communique avec eux dans ses performances par différentes actions à travers les mouvements du corps.

Pour "Only the Lonely", Kausalainen produit un travail performatif *in situ* inédit qu'elle associera à une installation dans l'espace. La performance aura lieu ici le samedi 6 juin. Kausalainen considère ce travail comme une collaboration entre les différents éléments qu'elle expose, elle-même mais aussi avec l'espace de La Galerie. Pour elle, l'œuvre dans sa totalité est une performance—les éléments avec lesquels elle collabore poursuivent la performance à la suite de sa propre participation en juin. Les éléments présentés sont choisis en relation à la fois au travail récent de l'artiste mais avant tout à l'espace et à l'atmosphère de La Galerie.

Nanna Nordström (née en 1981 en Suède) travaille avec des sculptures qu'elle regroupe souvent en différentes familles. Ses matériaux—tels que le bois contreplaqué, du pain de seigle séché, ou encore des pierres—à la fois fragiles et stables, sont associés au quotidien. Ils semblent insignifiants par eux-mêmes jusqu'à ce qu'ils soient assemblés lors de complexes exercices d'équilibre pour devenir de véritables entités avec leurs existences propres.

Pour "Only the Lonely" l'artiste a conçu un nouveau groupe spécifiquement pensé pour le lieu en rassemblant différents personnages provenant d'installations récentes. Beaucoup des personnages présents ailleurs dans ces salles semblent rechercher un contact, et même vous toucher. Néanmoins, les personnages de Nordström requièrent une certaine intégrité. Les œuvres sont à la fois délicates et sévères dans leur matérialité. Chacun des éléments dépendent les uns des autres. Cependant, elles doivent être appréhendées comme des objets muséaux. Nous devons garder une certaine distance vis-à-vis d'elles pour respecter leurs existences.

Maxime Thieffine (né en 1973 en France) travaille sur la série *Les Comédiens* en parallèle à d'autres projets depuis 2011. Les comédiens sont des personnages surgissant de différents types de matériaux du quotidien avec lesquels l'artiste travaille—pas tout à fait des restes inutilisés, mais plutôt des compilations qui apparaissent comme différentes pièces de puzzle trouvées au hasard. Les œuvres pré-sentes semblent contenir différentes caractéristiques, presque différents types de personnalités. En les observant, on peut comprendre comment leurs apparences se construisent. On peut voir la structure formelle du travail, mais sommes-nous capables de comprendre pourquoi certains nous apparaissent immédiatement sexuels, d'autres pas à leur place ou d'autres encore, un peu tristes?

Emma Hart's (b. 1974 in the United Kingdom) audio-visual sculptures are often noisy and sometimes even rude, while always being awkward, appealing and humorous. Starting her career as a photographer, the artist was intrigued and provoked by the gap between how things are experienced and how they look when photographed, and has since moved from photography to increasingly tactile materials, working at the moment most often with a combination of ceramics, sound, moving image and sculpture.

The series *TO DO* (2011) is a collection of figures the artist describes both as birds and her assistants. Presented for the first time in 2011 at Matt's Gallery in London, the 27 bird assistants were calling out to the artist and urging her to do a performance amongst them. The performance never happened. The assistants appear as almost socially needy, craving for attention both from the artist and the audience, from you, through their attractive material appearance and sometimes through their voices. Here Hart has brought a selection of assistants for you to meet.

Essi Kausalainen (b. 1979 in Finland) works with performance, in which she explores our relationships with nonhuman elements, materials and beings. During the past years, her special focus has been on plants, but is now moving on to other kinds of nonhuman entities. Her interest is in different kinds of systems of existence, which she interprets and communicates through the body's movements in her performances.

For "Only the Lonely" Kausalainen has created a new, site-specific performative work, which she presents together with a spatial installation. The performance takes place here on Saturday 6 June. Kausalainen sees the work as a collaboration between her and the elements she exhibits, as well as with the space of La Galerie. To her the work as a whole is a

performance—the elements she collaborates with are merely continuing the performance after her participation in June. The elements presented have been selected in a process affected both by the artist's recent practice and above all the space and atmosphere of La Galerie.

Nanna Nordström (b. 1981 in Sweden) works with sculptural installations she often groups as families. Her materials—including plywood, dried rye bread or stones—can be simultaneously rough and fragile, as they also associate with the everyday. Individually the materials might be insignificant, but together they become entities that create their own existence in a balancing act.

For "Only the Lonely" the artist has created a new site-specific grouping by bringing together characters from her recent installations. Many of the characters present elsewhere in these rooms appear to be craving for contact or even your touch. Nordström's characters however demand a certain integrity. The works are simultaneously fragile and harsh in their materiality. All of the elements of the works rely on each other. At the same time, the works need to be approached almost as museum objects. We need to take some physical distance to respect their existence.

Maxime Thieffine (b. 1973 in France) has been working on the series *Les Comédiens* alongside other projects since 2011. The comedians are characters who emerge from various kinds of everyday materials the artist works with—not exactly leftovers, but rather compilations that appear as puzzle pieces falling into place. The resultant artworks seem to have different kinds of characteristics, different kinds of personalities almost. Looking at them, we can figure out how the appearance is kept up. We can see the formal structure of the work, but can we figure out why some of them seem straightforwardly sexual,

L'artiste considère *Les Comédiens* comme des acteurs, presque comme des personnages de théâtre qui amalgament plusieurs éléments, perturbant ainsi des motifs familiaux par leurs apparences fragiles ou par de curieuses dispositions dans l'espace. Les comédiens prennent constamment le rôle de quelqu'un d'autre, cachant leur véritable identité. Ils semblent toujours être en action.

“Only the Lonely” s’accompagne d’un programme d’évènements, notamment un texte par l’auteure et curatrice Barbara Sireix. Ce texte intitulé *Don’t Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)* [Ne parle pas (Pose ta tête sur mon épaule)] fera l’objet d’une performance lors d’une lecture à La Galerie le 20 juin. Le texte sera aussi disponible sur le site internet de La Galerie à la suite de l’exposition et prendra la forme de dialogues suscités par les rencontres faites dans l’exposition.

Pour finir, j’aimerais revenir au point de départ. Le titre de l’exposition est un emprunt direct à la chanson mélancolique de Roy Orbison (1960)⁶. “Only the lonely, know the way I feel tonight. Only the lonely, know this feeling ain’t right” [“Seuls les solitaires savent ce que je ressens ce soir. Seuls les solitaires, savent que ce sentiment n’est pas bon”], chante Orbison de sa voix puissante et fragile à la fois. La chanson repose totalement sur une expérience collective de déchirement et de solitude, mais surtout sur un partage de celle-ci avec ceux qui savent. On ne trouve pas dans les paroles plus de détails sur ce sentiment ; seuls les solitaires savent exactement ce dont parle la chanson. À l’image de la chanson, l’exposition joue avec ces idées de relations et de sentiments partagés. Finalement, tout ceci revient à des questions relatives au domaine social, que ce soit l’échange, la communication ou la compassion en jeu dans nos interactions avec les autres êtres humains — et peut-être aussi avec des non-humains.

J’ai commencé ce texte en vous parlant de rencontres. La théoricienne féministe et physicienne quantique Karen Barad a écrit sur l’entremêlement et les *intra*-actions avec la matière⁷. Elle part de l’idée de l’*intra*-action présente en physique et l’explique en la distinguant des *inter*-actions. Tandis qu’une rencontre interactive se base sur un échange entre deux entités, l’*intra*-action peut être possible uniquement dans la rencontre, ou l’entremêlement lui-même. Les différentes parties de l’*intra*-action ne peuvent exister indépendamment. Il y a ici quelque chose de poétique, mélancolique et simplement beau. Imaginez que vous ne soyez jamais venu ici, que cette rencontre n’ait jamais eu lieu. Ne pensez-vous pas que la vie, pour chacun et chacune d’entre nous, serait un peu moins extraordinaire ? Je suis heureuse que vous soyez là.

some of them out of place, some of them a bit sad?

The artist sees the comedians as players, as theatre actors, who mix things up as they disrupt familiar patterns through their appearance, fragile nature or odd placement within the space. The comedians are always taking the role of someone else, never actually revealing their true selves. Thieffine’s comedians really do seem to be always at work.

“Only the Lonely” is accompanied by a programme of events, including an invited text contribution by curator and writer Barbara Sireix. Her text, *Don’t Talk (Put Your Head on My Shoulder)*, will be performed during a public reading at La Galerie 20 June. It will also be available on the La Galerie website after the exhibition, as a subjective exhibition documentation, consisting of dialogues triggered by the encounters in the space.

Finally, I want to go back to the start. The title of the exhibition is borrowed from the melancholic love song by Roy Orbison from 1960.⁶ “Only the lonely, know the way I feel tonight. Only the lonely, know this feeling ain’t right”, Orbison sings in his fragile yet powerful voice. The song is all about a collective experience of heartbreak and loneliness, and about sharing this with those in the know. The lyrics never go deeper into explaining the feeling; it’s only the lonely that know exactly what the song is about. Like the song, the exhibition plays with ideas about creating connections and looking for shared feelings. In the end it all comes down to the questions of social exchange, communication and compassion that take shape in encounters with other humans—and maybe also with nonhumans. I started this text by talking to you about encounters. Feminist theorist and quantum physicist Karen Barad has written about entanglements and *intra*-actions with matter⁷. She takes the idea of *intra*-action from physics, and explains it by

distinguishing it from interactions. While an interactive encounter is based on an exchange between two entities, *intra*-action is possible only in the encounter, or entanglement, itself. The parties of *intra*-action cannot exist without each other. There is something poetic, melancholic and beautiful in this. Imagine if you had never come here, if this encounter had never taken place. Don’t you think life, for all of us, would be a little less extraordinary? I’m so happy that you’re here.

6. Only The Lonely (Know How I Feel) / Roy Orbison (1960)
Dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah
Ooh-yay-yay-yay-yeah
Oh-oh-oh-oh-wah
Only the lonely
Only the lonely

Only the lonely (dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah)
Know the way I feel tonight (ooh-yay-yay-yay-yeah)
Only the lonely (dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah)---
Know this feeling ain’t right (dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah)

There goes my baby
There goes my heart
They’re gone forever
So far apart

But only the lonely
Know why
I cry
Only the lonely

Dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah
Ooh-yay-yay-yay-yeah
Oh-oh-oh-oh-wah
Only the lonely
Only the lonely

Only the lonely (dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah)
Know the heartaches I’ve been through (ooh-yay-yay-yay-yeah)
Only the lonely (dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah)
Know I cry and cry for you (dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah)

Maybe tomorrow
A new romance
No more sorrow
But that’s the chance

You gotta take
If your lonely heart breaks
Only the lonely

Dum-dum-dum-dumdy-doo-wah

Writers: Joe Melson, Sammy Cahn
Copyright: Sony/ATV Acuff Rose Music, Cahn Music Co.
http://www.wazlyrics.com/lyrics/royorbison/onlythelonlyknowhowifeel.html (Accessed 27 April 2015.)

7. Barad, K. (2007) *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Duke University Press, Durham & London.

Agenda

Performance

Samedi 6 juin à 18h
par Essi Kausalainen

Itinéraires d'expositions

Samedi 6 juin de 14h à 19h

Parcours Est #21: Itinéraire d'expositions
en transport en commun aux Instants
Chavirés (Montreuil), à la Maison populaire
(Montreuil) et à La Galerie
resa@parcours-est.com
ou 01 43 60 69 72

Samedi 4 juillet de 14h à 22h

Hospitalités 2015: "Maison puissance trois"
Itinéraire d'expositions à la maison rouge,
fondation Antoine de Galbert (Paris),
à La Galerie et à la Maison
populaire (Montreuil)
Tarifs: 4/7€

Lecture

Samedi 20 juin de 17h30 à 18h

"Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder)"
Lecture à plusieurs voix d'une fiction
de Barbara Sirieix en dialogue
avec les œuvres de l'exposition

Concert

Samedi 20 juin de 18h à 19h

Concert par la classe de musique assistée
par ordinateur (MAO) du conservatoire
communautaire de musique et de danse
à Noisy-le-Sec

Colophon

Traductions: J. Tittensor et G. Lesturgie
Coordination éditoriale: Marjolaine Calipel
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chez Direct Impression

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Tram, réseau art contemporain Paris/Île-de-France
D.c.a, association française de développement des centres d'art
Arts en résidence

La Galerie, centre d'art contemporain, est financée par
la Ville de Noisy-le-Sec avec le soutien de la Direction régionale des Affaires
culturelles d'Île-de-France - Ministère de la Culture et de la Communication,
du Département de la Seine-Saint-Denis et du Conseil régional d'Île-de-France



Events

Performance

Saturday 6 June at 6pm
by Essi Kausalainen

Exhibition tours

Saturday 6 June, 2-7pm

Eastern Trail #21: Exhibition tour by public
transport: Les Instants Chavirés (Montreuil),
La Maison Populaire (Montreuil)
and La Galerie
resa@parcours-est.com
or +33 [0]1 43 60 69 72

Saturday 4 July, 2-10pm

Hospitalities 2015:
"House to the Power of Three". Exhibition
tour: La Maison Rouge, the Antoine
de Galbert Foundation (Paris), La Galerie
and La Maison Populaire (Montreuil)
4€/7€

Reading

Saturday 20 June, 5.30-6pm

"Don't Talk (Put Your Head On My Shoulder)"
A dialogue with the works in the exhibition:
several voices interpret a work of fiction
by Barbara Sirieix

Concert

Saturday 20 June, 6-7pm

Concert by the computer aided music class
of the Noisy-le-Sec community conservatory
of music and dance

Nous remercions chaleureusement:

Elina Suoyrjö, les artistes

Le prêteur: Bonnier Art Collection

Pour leur participation aux événements:

Barbara Sirieix, Robert Rudolf et les élèves du conservatoire
communautaire de musique et de danse de Noisy-le-Sec

Elina Suoyrjö tient à remercier

tous les artistes pour cette belle collaboration,
Barbara Sirieix pour les échanges, sa famille et amis pour leur soutien
et toute l'équipe de La Galerie pour leur travail extraordinaire
et leur accueil chaleureux.

La Galerie

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Entrée libre

Du mardi au vendredi de 14h à 18h

Samedi de 14h à 19h

Facebook: "La Galerie Centre d'art contemporain"

Only the Lonely

23 May – 18 July 2015

La Galerie centre l'art contemporain, Noisy-le-Sec/Paris, France























Only the Lonely

Curatrice en résidence : Elina Suoyrjö

Jonathan Baldock, Cécile B. Evans
Emma Hart, Essi Kausalainen
Nanna Nordström, Maxime Thieffine

23 mai - 18 juillet



Appendix 2: *Good Vibrations*

Good Vibrations

29 April – 28 May 2017

SIC space, Helsinki, Finland

With

Julie Béna (FR)

Happy Magic Society (FI)

Beatrice Lozza (CZ)

Shana Moulton (US)

mirko nikolić (SRB)

Nastja Säde Rönkkö (FI)

Curated by Elina Suoyrjö

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Documentation images by Tuomas Linna / SIC

SIC

Good Vibrations

29.4.–28.5.2017

With Julie Béna, Happy Magic Society, Beatrice Lozza, Shana Moulton, mirko nikolić and Nastja Säde Rönkkö. Curated by Elina Suoyrjö.

Nastja Säde Rönkkö's participatory performance *sometimes forever* takes place on Thursday 18 May, 2-8pm. Visitors are invited to exchange a memory or a story for a tattoo. First come, first served.

A curious bunch of individuals - beings, things, materialities in differing sizes and forms - inhabit the space of the gallery during the exhibition. Building on warm-hearted feelings and aspirations, *Good Vibrations* invites visitors to tune into the frequencies of the artworks, and the energies moving around them. It is these nonhuman entities together with you, the entities who encounter them, that create *Good Vibrations* and negotiate what these pleasant and uplifting resonances might in fact be.

The artworks in the exhibition speak to us in various volumes, from nudges and whispers to direct invitations. A subtle yet mysterious scent, extracted especially for the occasion by Happy Magic Society, welcomes us into the space. Julie Béna has brought an enchanting object, full of potential wonder by its very definition, accompanied by a group of bodiless mouths functioning as a kind of punctuation throughout the space. Nastja Säde Rönkkö in her turn directly invites visitors to exchange their memories or stories for tattoos. During the day of the participatory performance, visitors have the chance to make good memories last, or bad ones fade away.

Good Vibrations also aims to give space to the vibrations and needs of the works themselves. Beatrice Lozza's thread decides its form at the site it is brought to, in relation to other elements around it. This is a sculptural drawing that takes its time, through subtle movement in concert with the conditions of the gallery space. There is plenty of room also for desires and pleasures. Within a passage prepared by mirko nikolić, the visitor finds themselves in an intimate situation between two nonhuman beings. To pass through, one needs to make a decision similar to that which Marina Abramović and Ulay once asked their audience to make.

Good Vibrations attempts to summon and emit positive energies, and work beyond the complexity that is to a large extent imprinted on good feeling and feeling good these days. When the

world is falling apart, there is no room for sarcasm or irony. It feels more efficient, more useful, more radical, to open up and show some vulnerability. Cynthia, the protagonist in Shana Moulton's video works, who is also the artist's alter ego, has found a way to do this. In the videos, we get to witness Cynthia's journey from worries and distress to wonder and healing. Sometimes magical objects can help us through rough times.

During a recent talk, a wise woman, Donna Haraway, pointed out that there is a certain comic quality to everything that really matters. Amidst the goings-on in the world, we should not stop at critiquing, but move forward. According to Haraway, the space for joyous play is to be found in art, and it is art that just might help us through this. So, I propose that we accept these subtle invitations, let the relations unfold, give space to the flow of energies, warm feelings, and even strange desires, and see what happens.

Good Vibrations

With Julie Béna, Happy Magic Society, Beatrice Lozza, Shana Moulton, mirko nikolić and Nastja Säde Rönkkö. Curated by Elina Suoyrjö.

28 April – 29 May 2017

Julie Béna

Mandrakore, 2016

fabric and plastic

a mouth nor a smile, 2017

ceramics

Happy Magic Society

Happy Magic Fragrance (Good Vibrations), 2017

aromatic oil in diffuser

Beatrice Lozza

Thread (aspacewithinaspacewithout), 2017

cleaning rag aka medical gauze and light bulbs

Shana Moulton

Sand Saga, 2008

digital video, 10:29 min

The Galactic Pot Healer, 2010

high-definition digital video, 8:32

MindPlace ThoughtStream, 2014

high-definition digital video, 11:57

mirko nikolić

im/ponderabilia, 2017

asparagus densiflorus, hedera helix, fabric, metal, wood

Nastja Säde Rönkkö

sometimes forever, 2016

participatory performance

The work takes place at SIC on Thursday 18 May, 2-8pm. Visitors are invited to exchange a memory or a story for a tattoo. First come, first served.

Good Vibrations

With Julie Béna, Happy Magic Society, Beatrice Lozza, Shana Moulton, mirko nikolić and Nastja Säde Rönkkö. Curated by Elina Suoyrjö.

28 April – 29 May 2017







