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Curating Contemporary Art

Royal College of Art

WHY DON'T

CURATORS

LIKE ART?

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation originates from the observation of the shift, over the last two decades, of curating from exhibition-making to *the curatorial* discourse, which has caused a progressive detachment of curators from art, in some cases even becoming hostility towards certain practices. Some preferential forms in which *the curatorial* takes shape are programming, archive studies, and the inflation of pedagogical models of curation, amongst others; while they nourish distrust and suspicion towards the white-cube model, exhibition-making and art history research.

Curatorial courses and academic debate are the starting point and the main field in which these (former-radical, newly-canonical) practices are fostered. However, when these positions migrate beyond the academic ambit, we should wonder about causes and consequences.

Two consequences are particularly apparent: the museums' most significant recent shift from collection-driven institutions to visitor-centred organisations; and the change of the set of values applied to assess art projects, which are ever more based on demonstrable outcomes, and ever less on considerations about quality.

With regards to causes, this shift towards 'Visitors Studies' and non-object-practices can be explained with the pressure for fundraising to which public institutions need to respond, inscribing their models into a market of socio-political commodities built up by cultural policy, of which the UK is a paradigmatic case.

This dissertation argues for the necessity to question the set of values behind these practices and the veracity at the base of their orientation; to recognise instrumentalisation; to restore expertise in art, to resolve dichotomies between exhibition-making practices and *the curatorial* discourse; and to refocus the curatorial work around art and artists.

This change could be initiated within the frameworks of the curatorial courses, which can propose the reconciliation of curators with those currently marginalised art practices and promote the collaboration between theoreticians and practitioners as the most auspicious manner of moving forward.

To my father, who taught me the value

of an independent mind.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

A few months ago, during a visit to the Fine Art Department of the Royal College of Art, where I am working towards the Curating Contemporary Art (CCA) master's degree, I found myself talking to a small group of students from the Painting Programme. What emerged from the conversation was to the effect of: "So you are in Curating... some other students in your course came here a few days ago, they started laughing at us and then they asked why we paint. It was frustrating". I understood at once what they meant. Frustration has not been an uncommon feeling in my experience at RCA, and I could share their disappointment. The sense that everything we were talking about in my course had very little to do with art and of a snobbish attitude towards many practices had me often wondering whether I was in the right programme and had chosen the right path for myself. Also, how can an institution teach painting to young artists and then foster young curators' presupposition that painting and other object-based practices are not interesting anymore? Many times things sounded wrong to me and I would have possibly even given up if it weren't for my previous positive experiences in the field, alongside a sort of personal, stubborn, critical attitude.

This anecdote highlights the fact that the question giving title to this paper - 'Why don't curators like art?' - is not solely a provocation; it rather lies in the actual first-hand observation of the detachment of curators from art, which often becomes even harsh hostility towards certain practices.

I am aware that this issue points to a contrary direction in comparison to most discussions about curating and that it directly contradicts many illustrious voices in the field which claim that curating should put distance between itself and just art. Yet, I still observed an urgency to advocate the necessity to refocus the curatorial work around art and artists, since it's my belief that in the recent shifts that are pushing curating ever more distant from art, what we

risk to lose substantially exceeds what we would gain. First of all, the loss of the sense of the intrinsic value of art; secondly, the consequential erosion of art expertise and art research; thirdly, the fall into technocracy, bureaucracy and instrumentalisation, among many other risks, some of which will be presented in this essay.

Clearly, I am not the only one, nor indeed the first, feeling that some widely accepted positions in curating yet put our field in jeopardy. The literature in favour of non-object based curating - whether or not under the umbrella of *the curatorial* - is sizable and spans over a couple of decades, while only recently have authors such as Hal Foster, Claire Bishop, and Munira Mirza started questioning the set of values behind these practices and the veracity at the base of their philosophical and socio-political orientation. Both instrumentalisation due to political interference within cultural institutions, and a certain radicalism which twisted experimental formats of curating of the early 21st century, have led to a number of curators who don't like art. But why don't they?

Of course, there is no straightforward reply, but it's still possible to articulate a series of hypotheses and to illustrate some facts which have pushed curating far beyond art.

In *Chapter 1*, dedicated to *the curatorial*, it is illustrated how we have witnessed a major shift in curators' agendas from the collection-caring and exhibition-making to 'generating knowledge' with all the ambiguity that this expression carries with it. Ambiguity is a key feature of *the curatorial*, since it does not respond to a singular definition, but is rather described as a multi-directional expanding practice able to embrace virtually all disciplines, including art which is considered as a starting point from whence to look away and step beyond. It is in any case possible to identify some preferential forms in which the curatorial takes shape, such as: programming, archive studies, and the inflation of pedagogical models of curation, amongst others.

In *Chapter 2*, it is described how *the curatorial* has been originated and fostered within the context of the postgraduate curatorial programmes such as CCA and the curating courses at Goldsmiths and Bard College. Courses have been supporting alternative and experimental directions of curating more than anything and, in recent years, most of their teaching has had some association more or less explicit with *the curatorial*. Perceptibly, the quality of the learning process has lain less in the training for a future working position as a curator, and more in the development and contribution of a speculative academic discourse, encouraging: a detachment from the exhibition making; a turn towards programming and pedagogy; a rejection of the white cube model; and so on. A case study recounting the CCA graduation projects in 2017 will point towards the outcomes of such conditioning and the interwoven risks, including the marginalisation of artists and some art practices.

In *Chapter 3*, is analysed the museums' most significant recent shift from collection-driven institutions to visitor-centred organisations existing no longer to preserve culture, but in order to develop and educate the public. Increasing room is given to pedagogical and participative activities that are either led by the institutions themselves or commissioned to artists. In that context, the audience is approached from the (false) assumption that visitors are a passive entity needing to be activated and bound to the intentions and the purposes of the organisers - which are mainly of a socio-political nature. The set of values to assess these projects focuses on demonstrable outcomes instead of quality, and rejects considerations of aesthetic nature as elitist and serving the interests of the private market made of few art collectors. However, a number of examples and the analysis of some theoreticians such as Hal Foster and Claire Bishop will suggest the possibility of instrumentalisation and that institutions respond themselves to a different market built up by cultural policy.

In *Chapter 4*, it is specifically investigated how what is defined as engagement with the audience is actually a statistical analysis conducted under pressure to satisfy a government eager for evidence, rather than an actual effort to make people more emancipated and aware of art contents - or for that matter, any contents at all. The pressure for fund-raising to which public institutions need to respond, allows the direct influence of politics on curatorial activities and makes compliance with political targets a priority in the programming of museums. UK cultural policy is a paradigmatic case that will be investigated across its history and through the direction of arts and cultural policy over the coming years, as has been set out in the Culture White Paper in 2016.

An evident limit of this dissertation is that it takes into consideration mainly immaterial practices such as programming, which are very difficult to grasp from documentation, and very difficult to assess, since they pursue invisible ambitions such as group dynamics and social situations. Also, these practices depend chiefly on subjective and not immediately tangible changes with gradual long-term effects.

Moreover, I am also aware that the inclusion of so many strands in a relatively short text makes it difficult to deal with any of them in a comprehensive way. This issue arose during my tutorials at RCA, and it had been suggested that I solved it by dwelling upon the ambit from which I started, specifically the nature of curatorial courses. This would have enabled me to provide a deep historical perspective of these programmes; analyse how they have changed over the years; investigate what paths their former students had followed in life; interview key figures in the academic field; and, above all, cross-examine what set of texts, ideologies and feedback harboured in the curatorial courses transforms aspiring curators into curators who don't like art.

However, I decided not to comply with that initial suggestion, as the real urgency I have identified is out in the real world and not confined to this academic niche. Although, in the

conclusions of this dissertation, it will indeed be revealed that most of the curators working in major museums, such as Tate, still have a background in history of art, research in art and protect collections; it is also true that biases towards programming, dematerialisation of art and the propensity of social outcomes upon aesthetical judgements, are a dominant tendency in the context of biennials, art centres and kunsthalles; and that the dichotomy between curating and curatorial might, if not rethought, lead to an uncertain future.

1. THE CURATORIAL

During recent workshops at RCA designed to help students in Curating with their dissertations, it was discovered that almost all 25 of them (including myself) were covering the topic of *the curatorial*.[1] This does not imply by any means that CCA students are all proposing the same argument since - as everyone in the field knows - there are many definitions of the curatorial and, paradoxically this makes it quite undefined. Conveniently undefined, I would say, for it can be stretched in any direction to cover more or less any angle or interest. Unfortunately, not all of its interpretations have any bearing on art.

In general terms, *the curatorial* is understood as a non object-oriented practice developing research and educational projects increasingly concerned with processes and socio-political discourses and that act as "vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debates".[2] Because the curatorial doesn't see the exhibition as a prominent form, it is developed mainly in academic papers and what is called *programming*: a set of practices and projects defining the institution in which they are taking place and that can adopt a variety of forms: texts, talks, actions, workshops, lectures, screenings, and interdisciplinary combinations, often characterised by being collective and participatory.

The most interesting part of these practices is that they allow a series of opportunities that in an exhibition are limited, such as: the possibility of indulging in long-term research, involving a large number of people from different backgrounds without the necessity of quickly reaching a consensus; or the possibility of dwelling upon questions in a continuous work-in-progress and the fascinating disposition of being polymorphous and challenging

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[1] Dissertation workshop with Ben Cranfield, CCA, Royal College of Art, London, 31 January 2017.

[2] Elena Filipovic and Barbara Vanderlinden, *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), p. 66.

traditional roles.[3] The artist is not solely conceived "as an individual producer of discrete objects" but rather "as a collaborator and producer of *situations*";[4] the work of art is reconceived as "an ongoing or long-term *project* with an unclear beginning and end; while the audience, previously conceived as a 'viewer' or ' beholder' is now repositioned as a co-producer or *participant*".[5]

It has been argued that the affirmation of collectivity is actually a "denigration of the individual", who is synonymous with the values of Cold-War liberalism and the following neoliberalism economic practices.[6] However, *the curatorial* practitioners' attempt to deconstruct and criticise established forms of display, and step beyond the limits of the traditions, in some cases goes too far and can become a sort of tout-court antagonism against the exhibition-making.

According to this (mis)interpretation, curating is a bare "technical modality";[7] a "gamut of professional practices that had to do with setting up exhibitions and other modes of display";[8] and a mere staging of the actual event of knowledge which is represented by *the curatorial* practice.[9] While *the curatorial* is depicted as "something that can operate beyond the field of

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[3] The interdisciplinary approach and a background other than art is actually prefered in the ambit of the curatorial, as it is possible to infer from Charles Esche.

> *I think it's important to enter the curatorial practice from another field. To be trained solely in art history, looking for lineages and provenances, hinders you from thinking about art in a broader frame - a connective tissue that unites positions and questions in a way that a disciplinary structure does not.*

'Interview with Charles Esche', in *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, ed. by Carolee Thea (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), p. 60.

[4] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 2.

[5] Ibid., p. 2.

[6] Ibid., p. 12.

[7] Maria Lind, 'Performing the Curatorial: An Introduction', in *Performing the Curatorial: Within and Beyond Art*, ed. by Maria Lind (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012), p. 9.

[8] Jean-Paul Martinon, *The Curatorial A Philosophy of Curating* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 9.

[9] Ibid., p.9.

art" to produce "a more viral presence consisting of signification processes and relationships between objections, people, places, ideas and so forth";[10] and "an endeavor that encourages you to start from the artwork but not stay there, to think with it but also away from and against it".[11]

This interpretation, as advanced by Maria Lind and Jean-Paul Martinon - and reinforced by many other such as Irit Rogoff, Charles Esche and Paul O'Neill, establishes a clear hierarchy in which *the curatorial* positions itself as a heroic breakout from pre-existing frames of reference embracing an expanded terrain of major social and political discourses, "principles of the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and translations".[12]

Even though these applications of *the curatorial* and the various acceptations that may be used as its definition, cannot be reduced to a set of positions that exist in opposition to exhibition making, they are nevertheless perversely detached from art and artists, which are on the contrary seen as a sort of villain in the story, the focus of a 'regressive' form of curating that would make the exhibition of artworks its primary matter.[13]

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[10] Maria Lind, 'The Curatorial' in *Selected Maria Lind Writing*, ed. by Brian Kuan Wood and Beatrice von Bismarck (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2010), p. 64.

[11] Maria Lind, 'Active cultures', *Artforum International*, 48.2 (2009), p. 103.

[12]
> *In the realm of the curatorial we see various principles that might not be associated with displaying works of art; that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage. In a sense the curatorial is thought and critical thought at that, that does not rush to embody itself , does not rush to concretise itself, but allows us to stay with the questions until they point us in some direction we might have not been able to predict.*

Irit Rogoff, 'Smuggling - An Embodied Criticality' in *eipcp: european institute for progressive cultural policies* <http://transform.eipcp.net> (2006), [last access: 28 March 2017].

[13]
> *A number of curators and commentators have called for a regression to the artwork-first model of curation: curating as selecting from an already-sanctioned art market; the disappearance of curatorial self-reflexivity; curatorial labor restricted to object-oriented exhibitions; curating reduced to working within institutions; establishing a canon or selecting from within a canon; curating associated with, or working within, a private collection or museum context as the only way forward.*

An example could be the project that Maria Lind produced with the collective Oda Projesi in 2003, in which the collective collaborated with a Turkish community in the area of Munich to arrange hairdressing, Tupperware parties and making food.[14]

Certainly, the true dangers represented by these practices, are not the practices in themselves - which can actually set a very useful method of research and development of critical thought - but rather the risk of "setting up an unnecessary polarisation between self-reflexive open-ended practices" and those practices that do not subscribe to these conditions.[15] To put it simply, claiming that *the curatorial* is an evolution and a betterment of curating is equal to say that curators that working beyond art are better than the ones working in art. The very word 'aesthetic' has become "highly contentious", almost "untouchable", and associated with "the triple enemy of formalism, decontextualisation and depoliticisation", while "art and the aesthetic are denigrated as merely visual, superfluous".[16] Moreover, there is a certain ambiguity in the insistence with which the expression 'generating knowledge' is used.[17] As a matter of fact, if by definition is almost impossible to

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Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', *The Exhibitionist*, 6 (2012), p. 57.

[14] Maria Lind, 'Actualisation of Space: The Case of Oda Projesi', in *eipcp: european institute for progressive cultural policies* <http://eipcp.net/transversal/1204/lind/en> (2004), [last access: 28 March 2017].

[15] Claire Doherty, 'The Institution is Dead! Long Live the Institution! Contemporary Art and New Institutionalism', *engage*, 15 (2004), pp. 6-13.

[16] Bishop (2012), p. 17-18.

[17] I am here referring to a vaste corpus of field literature, among which:
- Elena Filipovic and Barbara Vanderlinden (2006);
- Simon Sheik, 'Talk Value: Cultural Industry and Knowledge Economy', in *On Knowledge Production: A Critical Reader in Contemporary Art*, ed. by Maria Hlavajova, Jill Winder, and Binna Choi (Utrecht: BAK/Basis voor Actuele Kunst; Frankfurt am Main: Revolver: Archiv für Aktuelle Kunst, 2008);
- Victoria Walsh, *Transfigurations: Curatorial and Artistic Research in an Age of Migrations* (London: Royal College of Art, 2014); This publication is the result of a four-year curatorial and artistic research project led by the CCA and is part of the major European research project 'MeLa – European Museums in an Age of Migrations' funded within the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme.
- Hans Ulrich Obrist, 'The Future of Art According to Hans Ulrich Obrist' in *Artsy* <https://www.artsy.net/article/hans-ulrich-obrist-the-future-of-art-according-to-hans-ulrich-obrist> (01 February 2016), [last access: 28 March 2017].

work in culture without producing any knowledge, the remark of the need to produce it makes me think that what matters to museums and curating today is not the general knowledge intrinsically implied by art, but a rather different sort; a specific and useful knowledge which goes beyond generic culture to produce a specific outcome. It suggests a displacement of the focus from cultural knowledge - per se useless - to a technical knowledge functional to a scope of aims. That curating has been undergoing this change at the same time at which philosophy connected knowledge to power and social control - e.g. in Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault, two of the most quoted philosophers in curatorial studies - is hardly to be a pure coincidence. In particular, I am here interested in challenging the museum's presumed impartiality (on which I will expand in *Chapter 4*).

My belief is that, as argued also by curators such as Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Jens Hoffmann,[18] and as appropriately spotlighted by Anton Vidokle in his quite popular article 'Art Without Artist?' the necessity of going beyond the making of exhibitions should not become a justification for the work of curators to render the work of artists redundant, "nor a reinforcement of authorial claims that render artists and artworks merely actors and props for illustrating curatorial concepts".[19]

The shift in such a direction invites the threat of not only the art field being corroded from within by the undermining of artists' creative authority, but also the surrender to instrumentalisation, the neglect of art research and the loss of art expertise within institutions, beginning with the very training offered by the ever more in demand post-grad courses for curators.

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[18] See *Chapter 5.4*.

[19] Anton Vidokle, 'Art Without Artists?', *e-flux Journal*, 6 (May 2010)

<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/16/61285/art-without-artists/> [last access: 28 March 2017].

2. CURATING COURSES

Being the ambience in which I have developed the awareness that not all art curators like art is certainly not my sole reason for linking the problem to the courses for curators. Rather, I make this connection mostly because this is the environment where the term *curatorial* has been coined and developed.

As a matter of fact, Maria Lind started the theorisation of the concept of *the curatorial* around 2008-09, while she was director of the graduate programme at the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, currently directed by Paul O'Neill. Irit Rogoff, another one of the aforementioned outstanding voices in this ambit, founded the Department of Visual Culture at Goldsmiths, University of London in 2002 where she heads the PhD programme in Curatorial/Knowledge, a programme which boasts Jean-Paul Martinon as senior tutor (and whose description bounds it more to activism and politics rather than art).[20] Also, if in general terms *the curatorial* can be described in a variety of forms, some of which reported in the previous chapter, in actual terms *the curatorial* is almost always expressed as the corpus of academic conversations around curating.[21]

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[20] In the introduction to the PhD programme, Irit Rogoff and Jean Paul Martinon write:

> *(...)there will be considerable attention paid to the fields of activism and engagement which intersect with the curatorial, both politically and performatively. By this we mean to explore how the political is both staged and curated and how these are not simply reflections on political states but the actualisation of a politics. While much curatorial practice critically references political events, this program wishes to explore the way in which the curatorial is a point of access to politics as a mode of being. Instead of putting forward a praxis, the curatorial can become a mode of engagement in the world that cannot be anything but political.*

'Curatorial / Knowledge Introduction'': <http://ck.kein.org/full_introduction> [last access: 28 March 2017].

[21] Andrew Hunt, 'Curator, Curation, Curationism', *Art Monthly*, 390 (2015), pp. 13-16.

It's from the late 80s onwards that the curatorial studies programmes emerged, and most of them were initiated in the multidisciplinary symposium mode, in which groups of aspiring curators could mature their theoretical groundings and devise a final project reflecting their experience. Some of these programmes are organised within the pure academic field, in universities and colleges (e.g. RCA, Goldsmiths, Bard) some others are an educational offer designed by art centres and museums (e.g. De Appel, Whitney Independent Study Program, École du Magasin).[22] Most of these programmes have in common the aim to push forward the curatorial practice towards alternative and experimental directions, reinforce the ideological framings of their fellow students, encourage cooperative and interdisciplinary working methods, and focus in-depth on social, political and philosophical questions.[23] Their experimental nature is mainly manifested in the final projects that often follow the principle of daring; doing what in the 'real world' would be unlikely to be done and thinking free from the customary boundaries that each institution fixes for itself. Thus, the 'quality' of the learning process seem to lie less in the actual training for a future working position as a curator, and more in the development and contribution of a speculative academic discourse;[24] and the

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[22] In 1987, the curatorial program École du magasin, attached to the art centre Le Magasin in Grenoble, was established, and the Art History / Museum Study Program within the Independent Study Program (ISP) - initiated by the Whitney Musum of American Art in New York in 1968 - was renamed Curatorial and Critical Studies. The Royal College of Art inaugurated its programme in curating in 1992 in partnership with the Tate Gallery and the Arts Council of England and was the first curatorial program to be set up within a university and to offer a degree qualification and academic validation.

[23] This description is obtained intersecting the online official descriptions of the following programmes:
- MFA in Curating, Goldsmiths <http://www.gold.ac.uk/pg/mfa-curating/>;
- Post-Graduate Programme in Curating, Zurich University of the Arts <http://www.curating.org/information/>;
- De Appel Curatorial Programme <http://deappel.nl/en/curatorial-programme>;
- MA Curating Contemporary Art at RCA <https://www.rca.ac.uk/schools/school-of-humanities/cca/>;
  [last access for all links: 09 March 2017].

[24] This idea is illustrated by the positions expressed in the following few paragraphs, drawned by three discussions about curatorial programmes:
- the conference 'Trade Secrets: Education/Collection/History', organized by the Banff International Curatorial Institute in collaboration with Teresa Gleadowe, The Banff Centre, November 12-14, 2008,

two channels seem actually to diverge a great deal and to take at times the aspect of a confrontational feud.

According to the description offered by Teresa Gleadowe - who headed the CCA programme at RCA from 1992 to 2006 - while "on the job" curating "implies the absorption, over time, of a set of established behaviours" emphasising routines and minimising the decision-making involved in each action, curatorial programmes keep the door open to an ever-evolving critical space.[25] She also quotes MoMA curator Stuart Comer's views that curatorial programmes - he makes mention of the Whitney Independent Study Program - foster the construction and maintenance of a critical space resistant to professionalisation.[26]

The price for having such a space for research and investigation, a space to raise questions that public galleries and commercial art market cannot always accommodate, is the one detected by Polly Staple, who brings up this point when she tells how she has been recently served as external examiner at the Curating the Contemporary MA, a joint course between London Metropolitan University and Whitechapel Gallery, and how she "noticed that the students sometimes forgot or didn't realize the final and very important stage of their curatorial project – that is, where and how it lands. If you end up working at an institution,

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leading to the publication *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, ed. by Kitty Scott (Banff, AB/London: The Banff Centre Press and Koenig Books, 2011);

- the roundtable discussion on curatorial-studies programs 'Look and learn', in *Frieze* (01 September 2011) <https://frieze.com/article/look-learn> [last access: 09 March 2017];

- the symposium 'The Future Curatorial What Not and Study What? Conundrum', organised by CCS Bard and LUMA Foundation in partnership with Valand Art Academy, University of Gothenburg; Afterall Books: Exhibition Histories and Central Saint Martins, University of Arts London; and de Appel Arts Centre, November 6 – 8, 2014.

[25] Teresa Gleadowe, 'What does a curator need to know?', in *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, ed. by Kitty Scott, (Banff, AB/London: The Banff Centre Press and Koenig Books, 2011), pp. 16-27, (p. 19).

[26] Ibid., p. 22. Stuart Comer is Chief Curator of Media and Performance Art at MoMA. He is a former student of the CCA programme at RCA.

this issue is especially important".[27] Similarly, Anthony Huberman observes that many students, in this case in the CCS Bard, seem to reject doing final projects tailored to the white cube: "I was surprised how hard it was for them to fill the galleries because everyone seemed to want to do things elsewhere – radio broadcasts, public events, tours or performative projects. They didn't want to just do things in a room". And he follows:

> What worried me (...) was the importance they gave to the form and structure of the exhibition. It's fine to experiment with form and structure, but not just for the sake of it. (...) A show needs to start with the actual content of the art work and what it asks for. A show is interesting not because it experiments with form or structure, but because it finds ways to share the content of a work of art by creating an appropriate frame for that content.[28]

My feeling is that a considerable number of new and aspiring curators, and even some already-in-the-field ones, rather do the contrary, as to say put the sharing of a curatorial idea at the centre of their work and ask artists and artworks to act as a frame. Of course, it's not easy for the audience seeing the final result to detect this procedure, since the doubt can always remain whether curators started from artists or art related reflections or only from a curatorial concern to which artists and artworks have been asked to adapt themselves at a later stage. For this reason, the examples I am going to take are first-hand experiences from the final degree projects developed during my studies at RCA, of which - thanks to the regular meetings and workshops scheduled by the course tutors - I know well the set of established priorities, the procedures and the thoughts behind each project.

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[27] 'Look and learn', in *Frieze* (01 September 2011) <https://frieze.com/article/look-learn> [last access: 09 March 2017]. Polly Staple is Director of Chisenhale Gallery, London.

[28] Ibid. Anthony Huberman teaches at Hunter College and is the Director of The Artist's Institute in New York.

In 2017, for the first time, the graduation projects of the Curating Contemporary Art programme have been not only split up into groups of students (4 groups of 5 to 8 students each) but also realised in partnership with and within the framework of different kind of institutions only one of which is RCA itself. The other three groups were given the opportunity to work with Gasworks, Delfina Foundation and Beaconsfield Gallery Vauxhall. The four projects have complete independence from each other, since each responds to a completely different context and brief. However, as emerged during the common session between groups, some elements are recurrent: a special interest towards the fluidity of globalisation and new media; the tendency to seek intangible, virtual, participatory experiences; and the predominance of the programming format over the exhibition or commission of artworks.

Faithful to the idea of pushing forward the curatorial discourse, curators have antagonised once more the practice of exhibition-making, exploring some paradoxical solutions. For instance, the group that was asked to undertake a public sculpture commission in partnership with the Sculpture Programme at RCA (and of which I am part), turned to curate a talk about public art and two commissioned participatory performances in the private and indoor space of Beaconsfield Gallery. The group working in partnership with Delfina Foundation, invited to reflect on the practice of collecting,[29] shifted the question toward "what it means to collect intangible experiences, rather than physical artifacts" and just like the previously mentioned group, resolved for a series of participatory and performative works with a domestic flavour.[30] The reasonable doubt that emerges is whether the paradox behind these proposals (commissioning public art in a private space, interactive performances to sculpture students, and talking about domestic, daily experiences within the framework of a

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[29] The 2017 topic chosen by Delfina Foundation for its programme is 'Collection as Practice'. Through residencies, new commissions, and events, the programme poses urgent questions to both artists and collectors around the philosophy, psychology and politics of collecting.

[30] 'CCA Shows 2017: Open House', in *Royal College of Art*
 <http://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/cca-shows-2017-open-house/> [last access: 13 March 2017].

reflection about art collection) is the final point of a piece of research and a series of considerations of either intellectual, philosophical or ethical nature, or - as the above quoted Anthony Huberman suggests - a sort of experiment for the sake of it; a smart provocation not well enough anchored to a solid research soil; more the stilted fruit of a rejection of the normalised practices than a truly pondered alternative. If so, artworks have been instrumentalised and squeezed to meet a curatorial agenda and neither artists nor their works have been the main concern of the curators.

As a matter of fact, having witnessed the process of all four projects, I can summarise the general steps as follows: briefs to the curators from RCA; briefs to the curators from the partner institutions; development of the key ideas of the curatorial project; involvement of artists. Artists entered at quite a late stage of already-defined projects to which they were asked to respond, but without the option of significantly changing the terms and the intellectual structure behind them. In two cases in particular, artists provided curators with a stage more than a content. These are, of course, the two group exhibitions yet to be described here.

The project 'Itinerant Assembly' in partnership with Gasworks is mostly focused on a series of discursive workshops, 'assemblies' of people in real and virtual space, in order to mime the mode of production of temporary communities enabled by digital technology. The primary role of the artists in the project is to be "newly commissioned an immersive environment", providing a set for the conversation-based meetings.[31] Lastly, the project 'Turn the Tide', which has no external partners and is fully realised within the framework of RCA, is also the most experimental project, in which the tendencies seen so far are taken to an extreme. The eight curators of the project open an offshore company with the aim of representing liquidity, capital and globalisation. They write a sort of theatrical script about a

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[31] 'CCA Shows 2017: Itinerant Assembly', in *Royal College of Art* <https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/cca-shows-2017-itinerant-assembly/> [last access: 13 March 2017].

fictional business meeting of the company, which the audience is invited to act out, reading it aloud. Basically, the exhibition results in a performance ideated and orchestrated in all aspects from the curators, who are *de facto* also the main artists of the projects, while the secondarily involved artists are called, once again, to set up the "office environment" in which the curators create and perform the real content of the project.[32]

In spite of the fact that I think the space of freedom offered by curatorial courses is fundamental, as they can show new curators "a number of possible modes of operation, assist their intellectual, ethical and aesthetic development"[33] these above cases exemplify a dangerous tendency very much en vogue in the framework of curatorial education, that is:

- the excessive emancipation of the curators not only from the exhibition format but also from art and artists;

- the substitution of their practice for the art practice as the event core;

- the artificial stimulation of a demand for a type of artistic practice that requires a curator as a privileged interlocutor;

- and, as highlighted by Alex Farquharson, the marginalisation of those many instances in which the artist does not require a great deal from the curator in intellectual terms.[34]

Does it represent a real risk that, apparently, aspiring art curators are falling into these trends and seem not to like art enough? As I anticipated in the introduction of this essay, if *the curatorial* and the sort of hostility that its misinterpretation implies towards many art practices were just confined to the academic world, in the ambit of the speculative and of the philosophical, there would be no risk in it; just a fascinating intellectual challenge in some

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[32] 'CCA Shows 2017: Turn the Tide', in *Royal College of Art*

<https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/cca-shows-2017-turn-tide/> [last access: 13 March 2017].

[33] Cuauhémoc Medina, 'Raising Frankenstein' in *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, ed. by Kitty Scott, (Banff, AB/London: The Banff Centre Press and Koenig Books, 2011), pp.28-37, (p. 29).

[34] 'Look and learn', in *Frieze*, (01 September 2011) <https://frieze.com/article/look-learn> [last access: 09 March 2017]. Alex Farquharson has been Director of Nottingham Contemporary, UK, since 2007. From 2001 to 2007 he taught on the Curating Contemporary Art MA at the Royal College of Art, London.

successful cases, and a diverting entertainment in others. Nor - however - would it be an urgent topic. The urgency of talking about these tendencies, its risks and its perversity, resides precisely in its trespassing over the limit of the academic world, flooding into art institutions.

3. IN THE REAL WORLD

What do curators who don't like art do?

Mostly, they do what they have been taught in the curatorial courses and what they have heard in the curatorial symposia, trespassing the ambit of the academic and putting into practice *the curatorial* method. And - as we have already seen in the case of the graduations projects of the 2017 CCA course - the most prominent actual shape that *the curatorial* might assume is the programming; in the real world too.

Beyond any doubt, following the surge of the New Institutionalism, there has been a significant increase in programming of non-object based practices such as performances, sound installations, films, and video as a privileged and flexible form of curatorial practice with institutional critique and pedagogical attitudes.[35] An emblematic case is the 'Marathons' series that Hans Ulrich Obrist initiated as soon as he entered at the Serpentine Galleries, in 2006. From that year, every October, the Serpentine Galleries host a twenty-four hours programme[36] consisting of non-stop interviews, conversations, performances and panel discussions on quite open topics, such as 'Miracle' (2016), 'Transformation' (2015) or 'Extinction' (2014) fronted from a prism of disciplines such as: activism, anthropology, music, philosophy, theology and science, among others.

Another example of note is the currently ongoing annual programme at Tate Modern and Tate Liverpool, 'Tate Exchange' (September 2016 - June 2017), that was conceived from the question "How can art make a difference to society?", which - as will be demonstrated in the following chapter - has been something of an obsession of the cultural policy in the UK for the last couple of decades. The topic is vast, and its articulation in Tate has been quite

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[35] Walsh (2014), p.16.

[36] The 2016 edition did actually span over two days, from 8 Oct 2016, 10:00am to 10 Oct 2016, 12:00am.

vague and in many cases only tenuously related to art:, for instance: the puppetry theatre show 'Adventures in Biscuit Land'; a series of dance workshops inclusive of all ages and abilities; origami making sessions; a choir of homelessness inviting other people singing all together; and so on. Of course, any initiative addressed to the betterment of society is a good initiative, whether it demonstrates itself to be effective or not. However, taking into account that the programme has been realised in the context of Tate and contemporary art in response to quite a central question, I wonder: why such a simplistic and demotic answer? It seems that programming-based practices start from a couple of dubious assumptions. "The first is that the viewer is somehow passive"[37] and must be engaged with forms of activities alternative to art; the more interactive and participative, the better. "The second is that a finished work in the traditional sense cannot activate the viewer as effectively".[38] That is, some curators seem to think that aesthetic contemplation is tedious and the audience would go through the museum's galleries without being affected if there were not programmes elaborating a different set of experiences and entertainment offers.

Luckily, not everyone agrees. For example, Hal Foster is of a very different opinion. In his latest book, 'Bad New Days', he wonders about the reasons of the sudden embrace of live events in museums, the utmost interest in performative events, the preference for processes rather than final artworks, and the flourishment of other similar practices which are said to activate the viewer. Yet, it is Foster's belief that the most likely result from the audience towards the generic, the commonplace, the unfinished and the 'open work' is most likely to be indifference. Also, these practices present a high risk of illegibility and, above all, are not a means towards a better understanding of art or whatever else, but seem to promote activation, communication and connectivity for their own sake.[39]

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[37] Hal Foster, *Bad New Days: Art, Criticism, Emergency* (London: Verso, 2015), p. 133.

[38] Ibid., p. 133. The complete sentence from Hal Foster actually ends with: <which is false>.

[39] Ibid., p. 134.

Where one of the most outstanding advocates of this practice, the aforementioned Ulrich Obrist famously said "Collaboration is the answer",[40] Foster sagaciously adds: "But what is the question?".[41] What are the question and the reason behind the boom of programming, collaborative models, processes and the marathon conversation staged by Obrist and others? What's the rationale for "such a commitment to talk, and such a devaluation of thought; such a show of egalitarianism, and such a blow to expertise"?[42]

A logical motivation seems to be the need of the museum to activate itself rather than the visitor and show itself to be busy.[43] Moreover, it has already been observed that the programming shift can lead not only "to conditions of experimentation but also instrumentalisation";[44] and that the democratic rhetoric behind the centrality of the audience has very often economic driving forces, such as to present the case for government support meeting the targets of participation required by public funding bodies.[45] Lastly, programming could be a response to the fact that we live in an *experience economy* in which experiences prevail over services in strict correlation with the society of the spectacle and entertainment. So much as Hal Foster does not see the phenomenon as independent from the other less rhetoric experiences the museum offers, such as shops and restaurants; all offers that help to validate the museum, more than emancipate the viewers.

Besides, what if there were no need at all to activate and emancipate them? This point struck Foster while watching Frederick Wiseman's documentary 'National Gallery', a three-hour film about the well-known London museum, showing both a behind-the-scenes view of the museum and the crowd of visitors "engaging with the art and with one another in

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[40] Hans Ulrich Obrist, *Interviews, Volume 1* (New York: Charta, 2003) p. 410, quoted in Ibid., p. 136.

[41] Ibid., p.136.

[42] Ibid., p.182.

[43] Ibid., pp. 134-135.

[44] Walsh (2014), p. 16.

[45] See *Chapter 4*.

the most diverse ways".[46] Nevertheless, forging additional actions and planning collaborative assignments is apparently considered far more important than encouraging subjective views, contemplation, questions and alternative perspectives which should be matured autonomously and not suggested by guided activities and a pedagogical approach. Conversely, aesthetic judgement and parameters connected to the plastic features of the artworks are ever less taken into consideration.

Claire Bishop's recent concerns address cultural policy studies that focus on demonstrable outcomes and the necessity to keep alive reflections about 'quality'.[47] Discourses about 'quality' have been resolutely rejected by many art practitioners in the recent years, and have been contested as serving the interests of the market, of the financial elite and the intellectual elite with connoisseurial art history which - it is frequently said - would keep the general audience apart. Bishop, instead, advocates the urgent need to restore attention to value judgements and not to forget that we are still talking about art.[48]

As a matter of fact, ever more frequently the artist is conceived as "producer of *situations*"[49] which can consist, as we have seen in a few examples in *Chapter 2*, of the mere building up of a setting for a programme designed, owned and headlined by curators in terms of conversations and readings, among other forms, about topics ever less related to art and ever more related to socio-political trends.

While on the one hand, Claire Bishop understands and defends these preoccupations, on the other hand, she claims her goal to be to show the inadequacy of a positivist sociological approach to participatory art. One example she recounts is the one of Charles Esche writing about the Danish collective Superflex's project 'Tentaspint', an online TV station for the elderly residents of a run-down tower block in Liverpool. He assesses the project almost

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[46] Hal Foster, 'After the White Cube', in *London Review of Books*, vol.37 n.6 (19 march 2015), p. 26.

[47] Bishop (2012), p. 7.

[48] Ibid., pp. 8-13.

[49] Ibid., p. 2.

solely for its relevance to the state of British council housing and the sense of community that the project built and "his decision not to address what it meant for Superflex to be doing this project as art ultimately renders these value judgements indistinguishable from government art policy with its emphasis on verifiable outcomes".[50]

Paradigmatic examples of this curatorial attitude have been said to be: 'Documenta XI' (2002) curated by Okwui Enwezor - who stated that the artists and artworks to be included in the show mattered less than the archives from which the audience would have read them[51] and focused on ethnographic research and decolonisation;[52] and 'Istanbul Biennale 9' (2005) co-curated by Charles Esche with Vasif Kortun, which built a discourse largely revolving around activism and art/politics relations.

On the other side, an example of a different model of curating "reconnecting with the visual, without giving up the political and social dimensions of recent art discussions" is the 13th edition of 'Documenta', by Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev.[53] In an interview following her appointment as director of 'dOCUMENTA (13)', she claims that her being chosen is a sort of

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[50] Ibid., pp. 16-17.

[51] Irit Rogoff, 'The exapanded field', in *The Curatorial A Philosophy of Curating*, ed. by Jean-Paul Martinon (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2013), p. 46.

[52] Nevertheless, it is possible that Okwui Enwezor's intentions had been misinterpreted and assumed to be more radical than they actually are. Enwezor is indeed often mentioned in *the curatorial* field discourses for its manifest interest in post-colonialism, ethnography, and documentalist approaches; however, when interviewed about 'Documenta XI', he found "disconcerting" that critique focused so much on those aspects only while the exhibition was composed of "many more layer". In the same interview, Enwezor points out that his practice is not only very tightly bound to the exhibition-making, but that he believes that "exhibitions are narrative by nature", that his work is build as textually as well as spatially and that in contemporary art "there is no a dominant medium". Also about the lack of painting of his 'Documenta', he denied it to be intentional.
'Interview with Okwui Enwezor', in *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, ed. by Carolee Thea (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), p. 51.

[53] Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, 'The dance was very frenetic, lively, rattling, clanging, rolling, contorted, and lasted for a long time', in *dOCUMENTA (13) Catalog 1/3: The Book of Books* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz Verlag, 2012), p. 42.

paradox because of her differences from preceding curators.[54] Indeed, she stresses her "being someone whose quality was in trying to be very close to the artists and not to impose big curatorial strategies, themes, topics, games, or rules for the game".[55] She continues by wondering whether the reason behind her nomination may actually be the result of a "subconsciuos hope that maybe this moment of the curatorial turn can somehow be over".[56]

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[54] She does not mention any name in particular, however, she is arguably referring to Okwui Enwezor, since the context of her sentence is 'Documenta' in the 90s: "There's a paradox in me being nominated to do the documenta because I'm not the heroic, big curator of the 90s".

Peter Amdan, 'We Have Promises to Keep', in *Kunstkritikk*, (05 April 2011)

<http://www.kunstkritikk.com/artikler/we-have-promises-to-keep/> [last access: 29 March 2017].

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid.

4. (UK) CULTURAL POLICY

It is key to understand that audience research in museums is not neutral. The questions asked, the information determined to be useful, the means used to gather data and the way the information is organised and presented all depends on the social views of those who orchestrate it. (...) Visitor research activities are designed, carried out and assessed in the light of a specific 'belief-system' supported by the status quo.[57]

Specifically, in her essay about museum audience research, Cinta Esmel-Pamies is clearly of the idea that cultural policies are a subtle means of social control "under the guise of doing good for the citizenry".[58] Similarly, Munira Mirza in *The Politics of Culture* argues that policymakers' increasing interest in culture pertains to a new politicised kind of culture which is a tool for other purposes.[59] For example, cultural policy can shape a sense of belonging and national identity regulating the individual's conduct in the interest of the state.[60]

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[57] Cinta Esmel Pamies, 'Into the Politics of Museum Audience Research' in *Tate Enconters [E]dition Five: Reflecting on Reflexivity and the Transdisciplinary*, ed. by Victoria Walsh (Tate Online, 2010), p.32.

This text has been produced in the context of the a research project by Tate held between 2007 and 2010: 'Tate Encounters - Britishness and visual culture'. This research - which has been the starting point of my readings about UK cultural policy - was aimed towards a curatorial understanding of narratives of Britishness and how such notions are received and valued by people with a different ethnic background in order to trigger a change within the museum.

[58] Ibid., p. 13.

[59] Munira Mirza, *The Politics of Culture - The Case for Universalism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[60] This idea emerges from both Esmel Pamies and Mirza's texts. Esmel Pamies refers also to Justin Lewis, Toby Miller and George Yúdice who identify the emergent phenomenon of placing 'policy' into cultural studies in direct correlation with Michel Foucault's notion of state power and his model of 'governmentality':
- Justin Lewis, *Art, Culture and Enterprise: The Politics of Art and the Cultural Industries* (London: Routledge, 1990);
- Justin Lewis and and Toby Miller, *Critical Cultural Policy Studies: a Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003);
- Toby Miller and George Yúdice, *Cultural Policy* (London: SAGE, 2002).

In regards to examples which can support this view and the claims here illustrated, this chapter will take UK cultural policy as a case study.[61]

British cultural policy has changed many times since the 1940s, when present UK funding system had its origins.[62] In 1940, the first national body to support the arts, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was established, and in 1946 the CEMA evolved into the Arts Council of Great Britain to support the rebuilding of cultural life in the aftermath of the Second World War. Applying Churchill's vision, cultural policy was promoting excellence and quality in the 1950s, and the priorities were enriched by welfare and democratisation in the 1960s and 1970s, including a considerable debate about what forms of arts and culture should be subsidised (whether a traditional approach or the alternative culture movements).

A major change was towards a market orientated service provision under Thatcher in the 1980s, when drastic funding cuts to the arts and debates around the legitimacy of such funding, made arts institutions became dependent on the free market economy. Thatcher's impact on the arts, deriving from her considering public aids to be superfluous, produced a dramatic shift in emphasis from the arts themselves to the management of the arts,[63] which for the first time needed to prove themselves capable of finding new sources of revenue to

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[61] However, even though for simplicity's sake we can here just quickly go through the situation in the UK, it is important to keep present that dynamics of instrumentalisation connected to cultural policies and democratic rethoric, are far from limited just to our contry. On the contrary, numerous other instutions in many countries matches this model, especially in Europe, where the relative recent and surely troubled unification raised many questions about national identities.

[62] This summarised history of cultural policy in the UK is obteined by research from several sources, including:
- Esmel Pamies (2010);
- Rod Fisher and Andrew Ormston, 'United Kingdom. Historical perspective: cultural policies and instruments', in *Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe*, (15 April 2011) <http://www.culturalpolicies.net/web/unitedkingdom.php> [last access: 29 March 2017];
- Bishop (2012);
- Mirza (2012).

[63] Esmel Pamies (2010), p.11.

supplement their income.[64] The solution was, for the first time, situated in audiences with the establishment of new models in which patrons and donors became crucial to collections and other basic functions of museums; there was a significant development of the blockbuster museum shows that could attract large crowds; and museum-branded products began to be sold in museums shops, among others consequences.

In 1992, a re-elected Conservative government established for the first time a co-ordinated Ministry to deal with arts, museums, libraries, heritage, media, sport and tourism called the Department of National Heritage. The Arts Council of Great Britain was divided in 1994 to form the Arts Council of England (now Arts Council England), the Scottish Arts Council, and the Arts Council of Wales. At the same time, the National Lottery was established with the aim of transforming Britains's cultural landscape both refurbishing pre-existing arts and cultural centres, and building new ones. This apparently renewed enthusiasm for the arts shortly after the restrained government spending of Thatcherism, has been explained not as a return to the promotion of culture for its own sake - as it had been in Churchill's epoch - but as a political strategy linked to cultural policy. As a matter of fact, in cities such as Glasgow and Liverpool, culture was seen as a way of responding to industrial decline. For example, when Glasgow was nominated European City of Culture in 1990, positive interest and a boost in tourism were the effects in what had been previously thought as a "dirty, crime-ridden" city.[65]

However, the most consequential shift was certainly the one activated by the New Labour administration elected in 1997, that recognised the crucial role of the arts in an egalitarian

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[64] It is interesting to note that also the US was experiencing the same shift under the government of Ronald Regan. In 1981, Regan tried to abolish the National Endowment for the Arts. This first attempt failed, but in 1989 the NEA came again under public scrutiny for its support of controversial artists such as Robert Mapplethorpe and Andres Serrano and many grants to artists were temporarily obstructed.

[65] Mirza (2012), p. 5.

society, and attempted to remove the high and low culture dichotomy from cultural policy.[66]

The Department of National Heritage was renamed as the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and had had as its priority social inclusion and the educational process. In practice, this provoked museums in Britain to give priority to expanding their audience and make public culture more socially accessible to reflect (and attract) the wide scope of the multicultural British society. Furthermore, most of the art funding in the country was re-assigned to be linked to public representation.

The question under Tony Blair's New Labour party was: what can the arts do for society? And the real problems started when the "answers included anything but artistic experimentation and research as values in and of themselves".[67] Moreover, arts were then reshaped within a logic in which audience figures and marketing statistics became essential to securing public funding with a massive instrumentalisation of cultural policy aimed to favour social stability.[68] Two of the most important actions in this sense were the government's policy of making the national museums and galleries free in 1997, and the development of the 'Visitor Studies'. The latter started using sophisticated systems of segmentation and classification of the public such as lifestyle, ethnicity, social class, and soon became the core of the government policy and the principal index of the performativity of museums (and curators). Cultural institutions were now required to meet targets set by the government and produce evidence of their social impact to be monitored by the DCMS.

For example, Tate's funding agreements with the DCMS consists of a negotiated budget linked to targets set for a span of five years (the current one covers the period from 2016 to 2020, the previous one from 2011 to 2015).[69] Tate has to supply DCMS each year with data

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[66] Chris Smith, *Creative Britain* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), pp. 2-3. Chris Smith was the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport between 1997 and 2001.

[67] Bishop (2012), p. 13.

[68] Ibid., p. 13.

[69] Both documents are available online.

about a set of performance indicators provided by DCMS itself corresponding to targets mainly of quantitative nature, including among others: number of visits to the museum; number of visits by children; number of children participating in on-site organised activities; number of overseas visits. The 2011-15 agreement focused in particular on the number of visits by UK adults from an ethnic minority background, and the number of visits by UK adults having any disability or infirmity. The 2016-2020 shifts to requirements that Tate give priority to work with DCMS to engage internationally, "especially with high priority countries as indicated by Government" and does not explicitly mention divisions of the audience in ethnic minority and other issues, but it puts emphasis in giving priority to the target reported in the Culture White Paper.[70] The Culture White Paper (CWP) was published in 2016 and sets out the direction for arts and cultural policy over the coming years.[71] These can be summarised to be: increasing participation of people from disadvantaged backgrounds; strategies for increasing diversity; creating job opportunities for young people from minorities and with disabilities; ensuring that publicly-funded cultural events and programmes have a cumulative positive effect on mental and physical health; developing local communities; engaging with the opportunities offered by digitisation; enhancing UK soft powers and promoting 'brand Britain'.[72]

How do these policy directions by DCSM influence Tate and other institutions? First of all, obviously, they need to respond by doing activities whose outcome comply with the DCMS'

- 'Tate Management Agreement 2016-2020' <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/107059> [last access: 29 March 2017].
- 'Funding Agreement from 1 April 2011' <http://www.tate.org.uk/download/file/fid/11109> [last access: 29 March 2017].

[70] 'Tate Management Agreement 2016-2020', p. 1.

[71] 'The Culture White Paper', (March 2016), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-white-paper>, [last access: 29 March 2017]. The 2016 Culture White Paper is the first white paper for culture in more than 50 years and only the second ever published.

[72] Ibid., pp. 8-44.

wishes.[73] Secondly, the museum should establish a means of audience research to produce the 'evidence' showing the meeting of the government's political agenda for the country. Why so?

This is because cultural policy has been considered capable of solving issues of deprivation and exclusion, as we have seen in the '90s with the case of Glasgow; or as happened when Tate Modern opened in 2000 in a disused power station in Southwark, which had previously been thought of as a deprived wasteland; and as is happening now in the case of Hull, chosen as the UK City of Culture 2017.[74] So museums' missions have gradually become defined by pragmatic social purpose, and their activities have been explicitly steered by public funders into becoming a governmental tool over social problems. However, as pointed out by theorist Paola Merly, the outcomes of these social practices in cultural institutions do not really change the structural conditions of people's existence; only help people to accept them, trying to restrain the discontent of the weaker social classes, such as ethnic minorities. [75]

Moreover, the government started asking people to be individually responsible for what in the past had been concerns of the state. Under the allure of slogans such as 'Cool Britannia', people were formally called to develop creativity and a fresh lifestyle in a new, inclusive and democratic role-model country, but actually the population was more and more

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[73] Esmel Pamies (2010), p. 32.

[74] It is estimated that being the UK City of Culture 2017 will deliver a £60 million boost to Hull's local economy in 2017 alone. The UK City of Culture programme is a national cultural event spread over a year which aims to use culture as a catalyst for change. It was developed as a specific UK event following Liverpool's success as European Capital of Culture in 2008 and takes place every four years. Winning the title helps cities to attract more visitors, bring communities together, raise the profile of culture in the city, and promote new partnerships and collaborations.

'Case Studies for the Culture White Paper', in *www.gov.uk* (23 March 2016), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/culture-white-paper-case-studies/case-studies-for-the-culture-white -paper#Hull-UK-City-of-Culture-2017>, [last access: 29 March 2017].

[75] Bishop (2012), p. 14.

encouraged to embrace risk and be willing to self-exploit, among other expectations.[76] And this trend accelerated further with the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition coming to power in 2010, which encouraged a new culture of voluntarism and social action asking wageless volunteers to pick up where the government stepped back.[77]

To sum up, cultural policy in UK creates at least two controversial points: it reduces art to statistical information and performance indicators, prioritising social effect over considerations of artistic quality, creating a vacuum of aesthetic judgement;[78] and it instrumentalises citizens in order to make them match the government agenda or even substitute the state in solving problems within communities.

A third point at issue is whether this governmental strategy could even work. The Culture White Paper says so. It states that the government will put in place measures to increase participation in culture, and that "will require funded bodies to publish strategies for increasing diversity" since the government believes that "culture has the potential to transform communities (...) supporting jobs, economic growth, education, health and wellbeing",[79] as we saw has been thought since the '90s. Also, the CWP claims that there is evidence to show that "cultural participation can contribute to social relationships, community cohesion, and/or make communities feel safer and stronger"; and that "research has found

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[76] Ibid., p. 16.

[77] Ibid., p. 14.

Also see 'The Culture White Paper' (2016), p. 27:

> *Volunteering is a way for people of all ages and from all backgrounds and walks of life to get involved in cultural activities and support the work of cultural organisations. The government wants to see more people volunteering and getting involved in social action, including in the cultural sectors. We will work with Arts Council England, Historic England and other publicly-funded cultural organisations to encourage more volunteering opportunities in the cultural sectors.*

[78] Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontent', *Artforum*, 44.6 (February 2006), pp. 178-183.

[79] 'The Culture White Paper' (2016), p. 9.

positive links between cultural participation and improved social skills and engagement with the wider community, and evidence that culture can play a role in tackling crime".[80]

However, we have seen that there is also a disagreeing viewpoint. We read as according to Merly, for example, it doesn't provide an actual help, solely a palliative effect. And Munira Mirza, who was the Deputy Mayor for Culture and Education for the Mayor of London from 2008 to 2016 and has experienced first-hand a list of cases, even adds that cultural policy and a social approach in cultural institutions - as it is mostly carried on - can even embitter social divisions.

In the aforementioned book 'The Politics of Culture', Mirza reports two case studies. She first looks at Rich Mix, an arts centre in Shoreditch, not far from the Whitechapel Gallery, in an ethnically polyform part of London. Secondly, she looks at her own hometown, Oldham in the north of England, where cultural policy became a key element to deal with inter-ethnic tensions following race riots in 2001. In the Rich Mix example, she reports how competition between different ethnic groups vying for attention and influence did actually neutralise any possibility of benefit for the community. Something similar she noticed also in Oldham, where cultural policy interventions based on diversity tended to exacerbate rather than ameliorate people's sense of difference.

Her explanation is that these social practices start from a false assumption according to which "unless people see themselves, or people who look like them, reflected in the productions, paintings, or objects on offer, they will not be able to relate to them".[81] This made museums and public galleries focus on exhibitions, events and programmes about de-colonisation and ethnic minorities, creating a double confusion. First of all, citizens from ethnic minority backgrounds are continuously told by this separation that "race, ethnicity and cultural background are vital elements in defining identity"[82] nourishing a sense of difference

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[80] Ibid., p. 15.

[81] Mirza (2012), p. IX.

[82] Ibid., p. IX.

and separation from the rest of population which is electing to grant them space. Secondly, artists coming from ethnic minorities end up treated as 'producers of anthropological culture rather than art', as spotlighted by Pakistani-born artist Rasheed Araeen[83] and fall into a spiral of instrumentalisation.[84]

As a solution, Mirza advocates the *universalism* of art, which does not mean the same thing as uniformity and sameness, but rather "the capacity to understand difference but also to transcend it".[85] While mine conclusions and suggestions for a change follow in the next chapter.

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[83] Ibid., p. 185.

[84] Very few artists are brave enough to refuse opportunities in order to protect their work from being instrumentalised. A documented case is the one of Adrien Piper who in 2013 refused to participate in the exhibition Radical Presence at New York University. The exhibition was focused on 'black performance' and Piper's reply was that she no longer allows her work to be a part of 'all-black shows'.

[85] Mirza (2012), p. X.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Defending the intrinsic value of art

There was, until quite recently, a general consensus among both practitioners and theoreticians that the best works of art could speak to a universal humanity, and this view informed everything from education in the arts to the complex of art galleries and museums. [86] Conversely, nowadays the set of values put into play is mostly socio-political, strongly rooted in particular communities and contexts, leaving very little room for considerations about quality, aesthetics, and universality.

For instance, although the values of culture according to the UK Culture White Paper are threefold: intrinsic value, social value, and economic value, in truth, the explanation of what it meant by 'intrinsic value' describes not an intrinsic nature at all; it is indeed claimed that the intrinsic value of art resides in its "positive impact in personal wellbeing" and the way in which it "increases overall life satisfaction".[87]

Certainly, the tension between usefulness and uselessness in art is a rope not easy to unravel. However, it is quite straightforward to understand that something is missing if we declare that the value of art does not exceed its support to a social agenda. If this were the case, what would be the difference between art and social activism? And how would we value art from other times and other places? Would we reduce it to its historical and ethnographic traits? Although in some cases the two sorts of value can overlap and contribute together to the understanding of a piece of art, it would be far too unscrupulous to allow the artistic value to be completely absorbed by considerations of other natures and

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[86] Mirza (2012), p. X.

[87] 'The Culture White Paper' (2016), p. 15.

fade away. Social value is an added value that should not substitute the intrinsic value of art, least of all prevent us to judge art *per-se*. As highlighted by Dan Cameron: "art can be completely useless and still have profound consequences for its viewer, just as it can be overflowing with humanitarian purpose and yet still register as banal".[88]

Moreover, defence of the intrinsic value of art and arguing for its right to be useless is crucial not only to protect art and the poetic, abstract knowledge innate to it, but also to protect institutions, curators, artists and audiences.

Beginning with the audiences, we have seen in *Chapter 4* how cultural policy may lead to consequences such as: the normalisation of social injustice; the substitution of responsibilities that should be a concern of the government with citizens' self-led initiative - and ultimately self-exploitation; and the restrain of discontent within more vulnerable social groups without going any way towards ameliorating their sense of difference.

The use of culture in this sense, would also explain why public financial efforts are so targetted towards pushing practices of 'participation' promoting these outcomes, besides trying to convince everybody that audiences need to be engaged and activated by such activities. Audiences, instead, stubbornly continue to show more interest in the canonic

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[88] 'IHME 2017: What are curators for?', in *IHME Festival (2017)*
 <https://www.ihmefestival.fi/en/2016/11/ihme-2017-what-are-curators-for/>, [last access: 29 March 2017].
The core of the 2017 IHME Contemporary Art Festival, Helsinki, is the meaning of art, the switch of art funding to targets that have a 'measurable benefit' and whether should be useful. Besides Dan Cameron (2017), Mirza (2012) ever more curators are realising how important is to argue for uselessness of art in our times.
On this topic, defending the right of art to uselessness there is a growing literature, among which:
- Irmgard Emmelhainz, 'Art and the Cultural Turn: Farewell to Committed, Autonomous Art?', *e-flux Journal*, 42 (February 2013)
<http://www.e-flux.com/journal/42/60266/art-and-the-cultural-turn-farewell-to-committed-autonomous-art/> [last access: 29 March 2017].
- 'Really Useful Knowledge', in *Museo Reina Sofia* (2014)
<http://www.museoreinasofia.es/sites/default/files/notas-de-prensa/press_kit_really_useful_knowledge_exhibition.pdf> [last access: 29 March 2017].

exhibition model,[89] and to present less than positive reactions to the new models of curating (we have read as Hal Foster talks about "indifference" in *Chapter 3*, and Munira Mirza of exacerbation of tensions and divisions in *Chapter 4*).

Indeed, declaring viewers so passive that they have to be activated, and artworks so dead that they have to be animated is not only tendencious, but also false. While contemplation of art is really open to subjective feelings and thinking that can move the viewer from within and encourage emancipation, passion for the arts, and independent thought, directed activities bound visitors to an external contrived will.

This feeling of artificial intentionality put into play by external forces also applies to artists. Arguably, funding opportunities promoted as cultural aids are instead forcefully influencing art practitioners by narrowing evaluation processes around measurable social outcomes. Art commissions funded thus, despite being supposedly 'experimental' for not being restricted to the former logic of exhibitions and collections, are actually far from free: artists are put under the pressure to be socially useful; to produce results in term of relationships; and to facilitate a contingent political agenda.

At the same time, they witness the loss of consideration reserved for them by the very institutions and funding bodies on which they rely; and, unfortunately, curators are accomplices in this procedure. As a matter of fact, by insisting upon methods and processes of the art projects rather than contents, curators are moving the focus from the final artwork to the net of relationships, procedures and circumstances that define the institutionality of the art field. Artist Daniel Buren, interviewed about what it means to artists to be 'curated' today, remarks that too many exhibitions are increasingly "becoming opportunities for an organizer or a curator (...) to write an essay which usually has nothing to do with the artists invited, but

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[89] Going through the annual Tate Reports, it appearss clear that the biggest draws for visitors are still big exhibitions and artworks. All annual reports are online: http://www.tate.org.uk/about/who-we-are/tate-reports [last access: 29 March 2017].

concerns only his or her philosophy about art and society, politics or aesthetics".[90] Artists are thus chosen to merely illustrate 'concepts' most of the time rather than art, and in this way become tools, as we also saw in some examples in *Chapter 2*.

How aware are curators of these dynamics? A further doubt is indeed whether curators are factually 'progressing' to *the curatorial* and the other forms explored in this text or if a subtle form of coercion is acting also in this case. How much cultural policy, by commissioning and encouraging social and educative projects, influences - consciously or unconsciously - their practice too? In the shift from the exhibition-making to these broader tasks, curators are said to have expanded their practice while they have actually less autonomy in the process of selection and production of contents, which must now respond to criteria of performativity of the system.

And what about the institutions in which these practices are perpetuated? If museums will eventually abandon the focus on their collections in favour of transient socially engaging projects, and if they will more resolutely substitute art history research with visit study, the risk is that after the contingencies linked to the actual cultural policy come to an end, institutions will retrospectively understand with regret the value of the culture they have lost and the significance of the role they have handed over.

5.2 Recognising instrumentalisation

In her 1968 essay 'The Crisis in Culture', Hannah Arendt argues that true art has no purpose and its uselessness prevents it from taking part in politics. Indeed, even if art and politics have in common the trait of acting in the public sphere, political actions necessarily imply practical purposes, while art is independent from any rationale. She also makes the case

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[90] Dan Fox, 'Being Curated' in *Frieze*, (12 April 2013) <https://frieze.com/article/being-curated> [last access: 09 March 2017].

that when an aberration of art starts having political aims, it is in danger of becoming propaganda, such as in the case of Stalin's regime and Socialist Realism.[91]

Art has a long history of instrumentalisation. We have already historicised how the last century (and before) did exploit art, while it is naturally more difficult to recognise instrumentalisation when we live in (and of) the system that nourishes it. However, the fact that to a large extent public accountability is questioned by the government and answered by the institution in quantitative terms, it's a revealing hint.

While, on the one hand, ever more frequently curators reject the idea of an object-based practice for the possibilities of being instrumentalised by the commercial market of big private galleries and powerful private collectors, on the other hand it's crucial to understand that the public system also affirms its alternative "commercial logic" which operates toward the transformation of art into a political commodity.

Most assuredly, instrumentalisation is not an innate feature of the practices inscribed within *the curatorial* and other non-object-based forms of curating. These methods are not even in themselves hostile to art practices; quite the contrary. In truth, they emerged as new forms of collaboration between curators and artists to build new cultural apparatus and strengthen the effect of artworks and the public's understanding thereof. For example, most of the numerous archive-based exhibitions which fill in the contemporary art panorama present an interesting mix of data and interpretation from artists, and commission a new look to the past to effectively produce a new understanding of history and art altogether. However, the 'archival impulse'[92] has reached such a popularity that it is difficult to understand where lie the boundaries between spontaneous archive-based research from artists, collaborative archive-based projects between curators and artists, and the risk of using the art context to develop an archival work responding to an agenda of its own, becoming instrumentalised.

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[91] Hannah Arendt, 'The Crisis in Culture: Its Social and Its Political Significance', in *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (New York: Viking Press, 1968), pp. 197–226.

[92] Hal Foster, 'The Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 (2004), 3-22.

Indeed, "inevitably, every archive is created and classified in an ideological context. Without an ethical will to express the plurality of ideas that an archive can contain, the documentation is subject to the perversion of the exercising of power and cultural indoctrination".[93]

Hence, the risk of instrumentalisation lies not in the practices themselves, but in the possibility of being twisted either by being casually interpreted in a reductive way or intentionally perverted. Consequently, the fundamental question is how to recognise instrumentalisation without putting the blame only on a set of practices. "Through what conditions and methodology can performance art or immaterial art practices be the subject of research without instrumentalising the practice itself and corrupting the research process and outcomes?".[94] And "How can one act in a condition of propositional and sceptical ambivalence despite the fact that one's actions, aesthetics, practices, and thoughts are partially and potentially problematic?".[95]

The fact that well-established theoreticians and practitioners (such as Victoria Walsh and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, who respectively raised the above two questions) wonder for themselves how to avoid their work being instrumentalised, says much about the difficulty of the task, that would be beyond the scope of this paper to solve. However, it is surely possible to claim that a good starting point for recognising instrumentalisation is to dwell upon a reasonably sceptical doubt, have a deep knowledge of cultural policy, keep one's own critical thinking alert, and not to underestimate the worth of art expertise as a means to distinguish between significant concepts and mere strained notions.

5.3 Restoring expertise

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[93] *Folding the Exhibition*, ed. by MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Barcelona: MACBA, 2014). This publication is part of European research project 'MeLa – European Museums in an Age of Migrations' along with Walsh (2014).

[94] Walsh (2014), p.17.

[95] Christov-Bakargiev (2012), p. 40.

According to policy theorist Diana Stone, while disinterested research can be relevant to the policy process, its primary aim should be to maintain itself disinterested, and researchers should operate as much as possible outside or on the margins of policy-making, rather focusing on "accuracy, precision and rigour".[96]

In a way, it is suggested by Stone that a sort of perverse equation is in action for the more a researcher or practitioner is loyal to policies, the less his/her research will be independent and meticulous. On the wave of that, my perception is that the more curating shifts towards cultural-policy favoured practices (education, mediation between politics and audience, social programming, etc.), the less effort and critical thought can be involved in art research, exhibitions and collections. As we saw in *Chapter 4* in the words of Claire Bishop, and as is stated also by Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, the more the outcome focuses on quantity (of visitors) and "the tyranny of numbers goes uncontested", the fewer considerations regarding 'quality' will find space.[97]

For instance, in *Chapter 3*, we did read the criticism made by Hal Foster of long winded conversationalist programmes without quality of content, an issue that even a resolute defender of *the curatorial*, Irit Rogoff, couldn't help but notice. As soon as 2008, while considering the various recent turns in contemporary art, Rogoff mentioned also the "discursive turn", which transformed the art world into a "site of extensive talking".[98] And she wonders: "But did we put any value on what was actually being said?".[99]

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[96] Diana Stone, *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making (*New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), pp.13-23.

[97] Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, 'Counting visitors or visitors who count?', in *The museum time- machine: putting cultures on display*, ed. by Robert Lumley (London: Routledge, 1988).

[98] Irit Rogoff, 'Turning'' in *e-flux*, <http://www.e-flux.com/journal/00/68470/turning/> [last access: 29 March 2017].

[99] Ibid.

Similarly to Foster, who recognises in participative models a quest for connectivity for its own sake, Rogoff is questioning whether the talking among curators should not also need the added capacity of "recognizing when and why something important is being said".[100]

Being able to say something important, discerning between what it is significant and what it not, and recognising which contents would truly enrich the field means having expertise; or, at least, being eager to pass the authority to speak to one who is more competent to do so. Although 'democracy' is a model that we all appreciate, this does not mean that every content and opinion has the same exact value of all the others. Moreover, if we lose the capacity to prioritise, recognise and accredit, we lose knowledge, instead of producing it (which paradoxically seems to be the main aim of the discursive/curatorial turn).

The erosion of the concept of expertise and authority is simply put and well illustrated in an anecdote that Munira Mirza relates. A few years ago, she was visiting a major London gallery where a group of eight-year-olds was engaged in one of the numerous educational workshops tailored by institutions nowadays. In that workshop, specifically, they were making collages that the educationalist was praising profusely while drawing a parallel between the work on the walls by Eduardo Paolozzi and the kids' own. At this, one child raised his hand and asked: "Why, sir, if our work is so good, is his on the wall and not ours?". Mirza describes a look of terror crossing the educationalist's face while seeking the right answer to a question that, in plain terms, was asking where resides the value of art. Any satisfactory response would need to explore ideas like transcendence and critique as well as asserting authority.[101]

How will we explain, defend and enrich art (past, present and future) if we don't give back expertise-based authority to art historians, curators and museums? How can we assess art if we reduce all parameters to social performativity and the value imposed by cultural policy's

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[100] Ibid.

[101] Mirza (2012), p. VII.

democratic rhetoric of inclusion and egalitarianism that also many curators loyal to *the curatorial* seem to defend?

5.4 Resolving dichotomies

All these arguments are not intended to negate the value of every social/art project, public programme and educational initiative. On the contrary, my point of view is that the polarisation between curating and *the curatorial* is completely unnecessary, and once one has understood the nonsense of mutual exclusion, a model of joint collaboration clearly suggests itself to be the most auspicious manner of moving forward.

The complementarity of the two roles and visions is so strikingly evident, that it is almost unbelievable how few efforts have been made so far to reconcile these approaches. A large proportion of the theoreticians who work in *the curatorial*, as we have seen in *Chapter 2*, are indeed quite focused in disqualifying object-oriented practices. On the other side too, curators as Jens Hoffmann and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev level harsh criticism at *the curatorial*. Hoffmann coined the term *paracuratorial* to criticise curatorial practices that go beyond exhibition making or, in his own words: "exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited".[102] And also Chistov-Bakargiev has never been reticent in showing her distrust towards *the curatorial* and she does not even hesitate in defining herself allergic to it and decidedly positioning her practice among the exhibition-makers,[103] distancing herself from curators who instead prefer

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[102] Jens Hoffmannand Maria Lind, 'To Show or Not To Show', in *Mousse Magazine, (*4 September 2012) <http://www.moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=759> [last access: 29 March 2017].

[103] Emily Stokes, 'A Powerful Curator's Idiosyncratic Genius', in *The New York Times Style Magazine*, (01 December 2015) <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/02/t-magazine/istanbul-biennial-director-profile.html?_r=0> [last access: 29 March 2017].

holding conferences[104]. In addition, she points out that current curatorial experimentations are no longer radical as they were in the early 1990s. Conversely they have become rather canonical: "the most cliché and obvious thing you can do".[105]

However, from Christov-Bakargiev herself, comes one of the most successful attempts to mix together exhibition-making and curatorial discursivity, object-based practices and socio-political commitment, research in art history and interdisciplinarity: 'dOCUMENTA (13)'. In her 'Documenta', Christov-Bakargiev did indeed break many of those former-radical and newly-canonical clichés. For instance, in contrast with the ephemeral, temporary tendency of art - especially when inscribed in the biennial format - she commissioned many artworks that had a life beyond the event's closing. In departure from the audience-centrism of the curatorial practices, she set 'anti-anthropomorphism' as one of the main themes of her edition. Conversely to many curatorial practices that look away from art and ask artists to embrace other disciplines, Christov-Bakargiev reverted the trend inviting - along with artists, still representing the majority of the exhibition - participants from many other backgrounds whose acts and knowledge "produce (...) aspects that art can cope with and absorb".[106] And while the social value of art is said to be best expressed by non-object based practices, she put together 'Brain', a miscellaneous collection of small objects from different epochs and cultures creating a sort of mind-map in which each object encoded social, political and cultural relations, and the whole spoke of war and resilience without falling either into the documentary, archivistic or journalistic code.[107]

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[104] 'Interview with Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev', in *On Curating: Interviews with Ten International Curators*, ed. by Carolee Thea (New York: D.A.P./Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), p. 71.

[105] Ibid., p. 74.

[106] Christov-Bakargiev (2012), p. 45. The other disciplines involved include, among others: science, physics, biology, eco-architecture, organic agriculture, renewable-energy research, philosophy, anthropology, economics, political theory, and poetry.

[107] Among the object included in 'Brain': six Giorgio Morandi's paintings along with the actual objects that Morandi painted; Eva Braun's final bottle of perfume which the photographer Lee Miller found in Hitler's bathroom in 1945; two Roman-era figurines burnt from bombings in Beirut; the Bactrian Princesses, stone miniatures from Central

Along with these innovative insights, 'dOCUMENTA (13)' also presents the elements which characterise the 'Documenta' exhibitions in general, first of all the socio-political commitment and pragmatism. In fact, the abstract description of the political feeling in 'Brain' is then counter-balanced with a large number of works that mark particular events or occurrences, including varied perspectives on recent disorders in Egypt, the Middle East and Afghanistan. A number of workshops and parallel events running both in Kassel and in Kabul - chosen as a second site for that edition - engage with the the war-torn country of Afghanistan and continue the 'Documenta' contextualisation in post-conflict heritage and the 'Documenta' statement about the major role that art can play in the social processes of reconstruction. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev's intention was indeed "to reconnect with visual, structural, and phenomenological analyses of the twentieth century without giving up the political and social dimensions of recent art discussions".[108] This reconnection, which inspired other major exhibitions such as Massimiliano Gioni's 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, is still a model which needs to be pursued with more effort. It can only be achieved if the dichotomies between old and new canons are mitigated; if the feud between object and non-object practices resolve; and if various models of curating start collaborating instead of denying each other's value. Education could (and should) assume a lead role in this reconnection, resolving the sort of Frankenstein complex of curators, raised now in curatorial courses amidst "a confusion of identities and disciplinary constructs".[109]

5.5 Rethinking curatorial courses

Asia dating from about 2000 BC, Vandy Rattana's photos of bomb-crater lakes in Vietnam; two Giuseppe Penone's stones.

[108] Christov-Bakargiev (2012), p. 42.

[109] Kitty Scott, 'Introduction', in *Raising Frankenstein: Curatorial Education and Its Discontents*, ed. by Kitty Scot (Banff, AB/London: The Banff Centre Press and Koenig Books, 2011), p. 11.

Something about the curatorial courses is not working properly. If this were not the case, how could we explain the fact that in a city like London, where two of the world's leading postgraduate courses for curators are found (RCA and Goldsmiths) - and many others are emerging (e.g. MA Curating the Contemporary, London Metropolitan University), only an exiguous part of curators working in the major institutions come from these programmes?

Teresa Gleadowe observed that these courses have a limited serviceability in the search for jobs, most likely because their tendency is to nourish suspicion towards the white-cube model, exhibition-making and art history research, with the consequence that "their graduates tend to look elsewhere for employment". For example, they would rather develop independent projects[110] or work within institutions, but in education and public programme departments. I would like to add that, arguably, it is not only the former students who look elsewhere for employment: most likely, museums too look elsewhere for hiring.

For example, recently appointed new director at Tate Modern, Frances Morris, took her MA in Art History at Courtauld. Nicholas Serota too came from that same path of studies. And this made me start wondering how many curators with an actual background in curating are working at Tate. In order to satisfy my own personal curiosity, I put together a very quick table (that now is part of this dissertation as *Appendix 1*) while I was reading the profiles of the curators published on Tate's website. In my table, there were initially only three columns: a first column for the initials of each one of the 50 curators listed on Tate's website (in the same alphabetical order);[111] a column to indicate who has a background in art history; and a column for those who have a background in curating. Although the table is far from being comprehensive and exhaustive (since not every curator's background is indicated on Tate's website, nor did further web search yield all of the outstanding information), the discrepancy

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[110] Gleadowe (2011), p. 24.

[111] <http://www.tate.org.uk/about/who-we-are/tate-structure-and-staff/staff-profiles>.

between the percentage of curators coming from studies in art history (at least 60%) and curatorial studies (4%) is blatant.

This data appeared so significant to me that I decided to include that table and to expand it into two more categories: curators who joined Tate in the last 10 years, because it is in this time span that *the curatorial* arose, as seen in *Chapter 1* and *Chapter 2*; and whether the curators are working in Tate Britain or Tate Modern, since the very nature of the collection in Tate Britain requires a strong art history expertise. The percentages updated with these new parameters not only confirmed the first impression, but made it even more alarming. Indeed, considering only the curators working in Tate Modern (21/50) and hired from 2007 onwards (13/21) - that is the segment in which it should be most likely to find former students of curating courses - the great majority of them has a background in art history (11/13 - representing 85%) and none seems to come from a path in curatorial studies.

Why don't museums like curators? The answer is inevitably connected to why don't curators like art.

It is essential here to remark that in these provoking questions, I am not totalising and talking of the whole art system and every curator. I am rather talking about curating courses, curatorial discourses raised in and supported by the academic field (see *Chapter 2*), and the curators who also 'in the real world' bring with themselves some risky tendencies that characterise the theory of curating and that become instrumental in the context of the current cultural policy (as shown in *Chapter 3*). Also, I am aware that placing all the blame on curatorial courses would be improper and most likely wrong. However, on the other hand, it is undeniable that, curatorial courses being the education and training of curators, they are far from exempt from responsibility.

In *Chapter 2* I have listed some of the dangerous tendencies in the framework of curatorial education that can affect the future of our practice. They can be further summarised in: an excessive detachment of curators from art, the centralisation of curatorial practices; and the

consequent marginalisation of those other art practices which do not require a curator as a privileged interlocutor.

How exactly do curatorial courses encourage new curators not to like art? And what can curatorial programmes change in order to contain these risks?

The main problem is likely to be the fact that in these courses art is hardly ever taken into account, apparently in order to differentiate themselves from courses in history of art. This is the explanation officially given on various occasions from the course staff to the course students about the lack of art-orientated literature in the CCA course. The whole corpus of texts included in the course is indeed orientated towards the curatorial discourses or curatorial mediations, which can easily be misinterpreted by students as a form of hierarchy in which curatorial practices are essentially more important than art practices.

A second issue of note is that these texts basically represent only one side of the curatorial debate. From my own experience, all the research to find texts about instrumentalisation, problematising the curatorial approach and arguing in favour of exhibition-making practices, had to be an *ex-novo* research, since they are completely under-represented in both the required and suggested reading lists provided by the course tutors. Not hearing both sides of an argument prevents development of critical thought and the challenge of the *status quo*.

Thirdly, the nature of guidance provided within the context of the graduation projects, as we saw in *Chapter 2* with regards to CCA 2017 final exhibitions, might towards experimentations resolving in no exhibitions at all. Prioritising experimentation for its own sake over contents might create even more confusion on what is expected of curators and, most importantly, put ever more distance between curators and art research.

All the concerns addressed in this dissertation, including the above three critical points within curatorial courses, might be a beginning for further reflections and research in order to hopefully reconcile the curatorial field with the other art practices.

Lee Miller & David E. Scherman
Lee Miller in Hitler's bathtub, 16 Prinzregentenplatz, Munich, Germany, 1945
black and white photograph, particular of the installation 'Brain'
Fridericianum, dOCUMENTA (13)
Courtesy Lee Miller Archives

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	background in art history	background in curating	hired after 2007	working in Tate Modern	working in Tate Britain
J.T.B	x		x	x	
M.B.W.	x		x		
S.B.	x		x	x	
C.B.			x		x
T.B.					x
J.B.				x	
D.B.B.					x
A.B.H.	x		x	x	
E.C.	x		x		x
A.C.	x		x		x
C.C.P.			x		x
E.C.	x		x	x	x
I.F.	x		x		x
L.F.	x		x	x	
M.G.	x			x	
A.G.	x			x	x
M.G.	x		x	x	
C.G.	x		x		
N.I.	x		x	x	
E.J.	x		x		x
C.J.			x		x
H.J.	x		x	x	
P.L.					

S.K.L.	x		x	x	
A.L.	x		x	x	
H.L.			x		x
I.M.	x		x	x	
S.M.			x	x	
J.M.			x		
F.M.			x	x	
J.M.				x	x
M.M.	x				x
S.O.	x		x		x
B.O.					
E.P.			x		
V.R.			x		
N.R.		x		x	
M.R.	x				
H.S.				x	
A.S.	x		x		x
I.S.			x		x
C.S.	x				
G.S.	x		x		x
J.H.T.	x				
C.W.		x			x
C.W.			x		
A.W.	x				x
Z.W.			x		x
C.W.	x			x	
L.Y.			x		x