

Curating Beyond Representation

The Paradox of Curating as a Site of Dialogics

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of
the requirements of the Royal College of Art
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2016

The Royal College of Art

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Abstract

Dynamic patterns of cultural exchanges and transformations in the era of globalisation have been disputed subjects in contemporary curating. This has fundamentally transformed the conception of art exhibitions. Today, with numerous biennials and international exhibitions in different cities, curating has become an international arena where the dynamics and complexities of the world intersect. However, contemporary curating, instead of presenting diverse narratives and subject matter, often presents an internationalised or institutionalised consensus of a global art community, based on the hegemony of the dominant culture.

Following this argument, this dissertation examines the practice of contemporary curating, questioning whether its framework fixates on limited frames of representation. And it asks the following questions through my own curatorial practices: firstly, what curatorial strategy can be employed for illustrating the complex narratives of contemporary art? Secondly, to what extent can this practice challenge situated knowledge and given frame of contemporary art and curating? And thirdly, how should the practice be evaluated in terms of enriching the narratives of contemporary art exhibitions?

These questions should not be discussed and answered within a single and dominant framework, since the term globalisation itself is illusory and even vaster than any definitions. Therefore, in order to keep this argument specific and reliable, the research will focus on a few related discourses and specific case studies of contemporary art. This includes close reflection on my own curatorial practices with contemporary Korean artists, which aim to depoliticise a uniform representation of Korean art. It will also involve in-depth research on the different artistic subjectivities of the artists, and some historical and critical studies on Korean art and a few related exhibitions.

Based on these studies and reflections, I will attempt to articulate my curatorial practices and conceptions in order to suggest some possible modes for curating complex narratives of art, with less erasing and effacing of realities, but with more visualisation of the overlap of diverse narratives. As mentioned, the discussion will be developed within specific contexts, narratives and practices of contemporary art. With the specific case studies, this practice-led research will develop a particular argument on curating beyond representation, moving across the complexly illustrated contours of contemporary curating and globalisation.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to everyone who has helped me through this research. In particular Christine Guth and Marquard Smith whose supervision and critical support was invaluable. I am also grateful to Mark Nash and Ruth Noack for giving encouragement and guiding my approaches in its early development. I would also like to extend my thanks to all the artists who considered, inspired and helped me to form this research. Finally, my very special thanks go to my family and Mungchi for their love, trust and everything.

Author's Declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification.

The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award of qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Hyukgue Kwon

November 2016

Introduction

For the last few decades, the term globalisation has been applied to almost every aspect of life: politics, economics, society and culture, turning the world into an integrated whole. Within this interconnected world, contemporary culture has presented far more complex and dynamic patterns of transformation. It is scattered, exchanged and rendered across national and cultural boundaries. A domestic story from Raymond Williams' *Towards 2000* illustrates the world well:

There was this Englishman who worked in the London office of a multinational corporation based in the United States. He drove home one evening in his Japanese car. His wife, who worked in a firm which imported German kitchen equipment, was already home. Her small Italian car was often quicker through the traffic. After a meal which included New Zealand lamb, Californian carrots, Mexican honey, French cheese and Spanish wine, they settled down to watch a programme on their television set, which was made in Finland. The programme was a retrospective celebration of the war to recapture the Falkland Islands. As they watched it they felt very warmly patriotic, and very proud to be British.¹

This story depicts daily life in the global society, but the duality of the story immediately raises a few questions: How is the notion of the nation-state perceived in the era of globalisation? Has the notion been eroded in the interconnected world? If not, what does globalisation actually mean? The process of globalisation has always revealed un-negotiable and uneven surfaces between local and global, as Fredric Jameson defined it with the contradictory words of 'untotalisable totality'.² Similarly, contemporary art has shown a level of paradox within its globalising process; during the 1990s, it explored a series of discourses and practices around globalisation, but most of them were grounded on the idea of cultural or national boundaries. The notion of cultural identity has played a seminal role in the discourses, and it often intensified the binary relation between local and global by continually inventing different identities and framing them in oppositional terms.

For the last few decades, there have been constant attempts in contemporary art to grasp and represent globalisation with the following questions: what it means that there is a globalised world; who we are within that world; how the world has impacted contemporary art; whether this integrated world has any relation to art? However, as seen

¹ Raymond Williams, *Towards 2000* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983) p. 177.

² Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi (eds.), *The Culture of Globalisation* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. xii

from Raymond Williams' duality and Fredric Jameson's paradox, the term globalisation itself is rather problematic and even illusionary, and it is also vaster than any suggested ideas and definitions. In this sense, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy maintained in his *The Creation of the World, Or, Globalisation* that we no longer know what the world or even we mean in the era of globalisation; we cannot consider ourselves standing in front of the world, but being always already in the world, therefore, we no longer know what to do with this world. Nancy further stated that the global world continuously discovers unknown features and creates new sites. So, we are still sure to obtain new results from them, but we nevertheless feel that we have reached a kind of end. This is because the world is being reduced to one picture of globalisation; the world keeps obtaining new boundaries of boundlessness, and it remains closed and blindly locked up within its own boundaries without accepting its boundlessness as its own. Therefore, globalisation may not mean that the world is expanding and open, but reduced and closed. The situation led Nancy to introduce the logic of 'false infinite', an infinite that has not yet negated itself, but realised itself as finite and contingent.³

This false infinite of globalisation is also observed in contemporary art. For example, art historian James Elkins has edited a book, *Is Art History Global?*, containing the following questions: 'What is the current form of art history?'; and 'Is it becoming global?' In the book, Elkins argues that art history can be a single cohesive sphere, not because it evolves from many different subject matters outside Europe and North America and distributes them evenly, but because it shares some basic methods within a defined set of protocols; for example, academic institutions, disciplines, objects, and canons. According to him, it is the methods, not the subject matter, that make the field of art history cohesive. Following on from this, he offers his answer to the question 'Is art history global?' with 'yes, art history is global, at least it is becoming global.'⁴

However, Elkins' argument reveals certain drawbacks. For example, the methods that he points out as unifying the field of art history are actually being tested and challenged by various subjects and contexts. Today, contemporary art illustrates a greater variety of differences with an almost un-illustratable complexity of narratives, and in this situation, art history around the world explores numerous things besides shared methods, references

³ See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World, Or, Globalisation*, trans., Françoise Raffoul and David Pettigrew (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007)

⁴ See James Elkins (ed.), *Is Art History Global?* (New York: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007)

and themes. Therefore, what Elkins calls global art history on the basis of methodology seems to be contradictory, since it can only recognise what it knows and what it can frame into certain forms. Of course, art history around the world seemingly shares certain themes and methods which can present various aspects of art; however, intensifying this sharing does not mean that it comes to a single globalised perspective.

There have been some attempts at appreciating the differences of contemporary art, and yet these attempts have not even begun to comprehend the genuine differences. Instead, contemporary art has become an institutional or standardised object in the global art world. Another example can be presented in this respect. In 2009, not long ago, the major art journal *October* circulated a questionnaire on contemporary art and globalisation, which questioned whether the image of free-floating contemporary art is real or imagined, and if it is real, how can one specify its principal causes beyond the general and gigantic reference to globalisation. Subsequently, the journal published a volume of responses collected from numerous art professionals, including practitioners, historians, and theorists such as Grant Kester, Pamela Lee, Terry Smith, James Elkins and many others. It seems that *October* asked relevant questions related to the current situation of the global art world that did not actually mean ‘multi’, but ‘mono’. However, unlike the adequacy of the questions, their footnote was rather disappointing and even shocking. In the footnote, the editors indicated that they approached about seventy art people – mostly critics, historians and curators – based *only* in Europe and the US because they believed that the questions were formulated from and related to those specific regions only.⁵ Did the journal *October* try to be ironic, showing their strategic disavowal of globalisation? Or was it a sort of public announcement that they supported Euro-American centralism?

Contemporary curating has also shared similar questions to those that *October* asked, with a long-standing and acute interest in reflecting and presenting the flexibility and diversity of free-floating contemporary art. For the last few decades, this curatorial interest has fundamentally transformed the practice of exhibition making along with the flourishing postcolonial discourses. In this situation, a number of biennales⁶ and international art events have been organised in different art centres around the world; additionally, contemporary curating has become a site where the dynamics and complexities of the

⁵ See ‘Questionnaire on The Contemporary’, *October*, No.130, Fall 2009, pp. 3-124.

⁶ In my research, as a matter of practicality and consistency, ‘biennale’ is used to refer to the biennales regardless of their linguistic differences or official spellings.

global art world intersect. However, the evaluation of whether these recent attempts grasped and presented a multitude of contemporary art is varied. For optimists, these international exhibitions serve as a critical site of experimentation with a sense of immediacy and flexibility, presenting diverse narratives of the global art world, as well as testing different frameworks of curating. For sceptics, in contrast, these exhibitions have been no more than specious international cultural events in late capitalism, initiated to fulfil an ever-growing cultural industry of globalisation. For them, the exhibitions present, instead of diverse narratives, an institutionalised consensus of Western hegemony, and never make any progressive steps out of conventional frameworks.⁷

Based upon these circumstances, my research attempts to interrogate the practices of contemporary curating to see whether they reveal a series of fixities and categorisations of difference, which frame the multiplicities of contemporary art with limited vocabularies and impose homogeneous patterns of cultural development. Furthermore, the research will question ‘to what extent can contemporary curating re/present the multiple facets of contemporary art without an illusive celebration of diversity, and beyond the management of differences?’ and ‘what curatorial modes and conceptions for that practice can be suggested?’

To answer these questions, a series of discussions around contemporary art and globalisation will be presented. However, as seen from these arguments, for example, the ones developed by Raymond Williams, Fredric Jameson and Jean-Luc Nancy, the impact of globalisation on our culture is still fluid and hardly illustrated in any definitive and comprehensive sense; it has been depicted by them as illusionary, paradoxical, problematic and even fake. In a similar sense, many discussions related to globalisation in the field of contemporary art do not make any valid argument but rather focus on an act of structuring a framework and boundaries that end up intensifying what is already perceived and institutionalised. As seen from the cases of James Elkins’ book and *October*’s questionnaire, these attempts only reinforced the false infinite of global art without appreciating diverse narratives of art. The question should be therefore, how can an argument on the subject of globalisation and contemporary art be specified and articulated whilst at the same time dealing with the almost un-illustratable complexity of the global

⁷ See Elena Filipovic, Marieke van Hal and Solveig Øvstebo (eds.), *The Biennial Reader* (Bergen: Bergen Kunsthall, 2010) See also Carlos Basualdo, ‘The Unstable Institution’ (2003), and Charlotte Bydler, ‘The Global Art World, Inc: On the Globalisation of Contemporary Art’ (2004) in *The Biennial Reader*.

art world. I believe it needs a greater sense of specificity rather than simultaneously dealing with numerous discourses and examples, and forcibly confining them within a pre-perceived framework. In this respect, this research project will develop an argument by focusing on very specific and actual cases of contemporary art instead of grasping at the incomprehensible totality of the global art world. In particular, the research investigates contemporary Korean artists and their exhibitions over the last two decades, and also my own curatorial projects with contemporary Korean artists, examining the same questions as part of this research.

This specificity of my research, particularly when looking at cases of contemporary Korean artists, should not be seen as a limited framework that excludes other international aspects because the sense of subjectivity will only apply to the subject, not the content. The research will connect specific case studies of Korean artists with broader issues around the global art world, for example, contemporary art history, current exhibition making systems, and the global art market. Contemporary Korean art has made its presence felt in the international art scene since the 1990s, when the notions of globalisation and a curating/art practice related to it spread throughout the art world. Both the circulation and representation of Korean art are closely related to its impact. In this regard, the research will take the case of Korean art as a specific example to develop an argument beyond the ungraspable uncertain contours of global art. Similarly, it should be also noted that my own curating practice is discussed as a part of the research, although it focuses on testing different ways of presenting Korean artists; is developed and discussed in a much wide sense of contemporary curating practice, along with a few related discourses and projects by other international artists and curators. Rather than examining a Korean context, it is more focused on discussing possible curatorial strategies that illustrate complex narratives and that also challenge the conventional frame of exhibition making.

Some other sceptical questions can be asked about this research. For instance, if the term globalisation is something that cannot be illustrated in any definitive sense, and contemporary art within it already lies beyond any characterised patterns of national and cultural origins, do we still need to talk about art and globalisation? Do we even need to talk about contemporary art with any cultural and national frames, such as Korean? Would this be a kind of regression to older meanings and discourse? Some terms in this research, such as globalisation and Korean art, surely carry older connotations, and it should be

admitted that the use of those terms could be problematic and even untenable, since they always entail dogmatic boundaries and categorical mistakes. For instance, the term ‘Korean art’ can be a problematic categorisation with a preconceived cultural frame. However, despite the conventional and rather problematic connotations, the research will use these terms; more precisely, by using them, the research aims to place the terms ‘under deconstruction’ or ‘under question’ in order to develop more adequate meanings, debates, and language. We have to use the terms to question; without using them, it would not be possible to discuss them. Thus, this should be seen as questioning the given frames and boundaries rather than merely repeating the same paradigmatic meanings of their previous constructions.

In this sense, the first chapter will involve historical studies on the recent shifts in contemporary Korean art and its introduction to Western countries. It includes in-depth research on some Korean art exhibitions in the UK, for example *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea* (1992) and *Korean Eye* (2012), as well as contemporary Korean artists who have been exhibiting internationally. Within the process of revisiting written histories and exploring current images of Korean art in the global art world, the chapter will express a level of concern over the absence or simplification of the reality of Korean art, and the stereotypical characterisation of that art. Here, the chapter argues that the limited vocabularies of Korean art stem from the conventional mode of curating, which is based on the explicit representation of cultural differences. And it further maintains that this conventional mode shares and operates with the ‘market logic’ of the global culture industry, promoting different aspects of exotic cultures. The chapter also looks at the vicious circle in which the cultural otherness of artists is often disguised as artistic excellence and where some artists strategically make works of art through the means of self-orientalising, in order to gain approval from the global art world; an example of ‘strategic essentialism’ as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak puts it.⁸ On the basis of this argument, the chapter will urge the need for further developed and specified curatorial modes that complicate the situated frames and present diverse narratives of contemporary art.

⁸ See Diana Fuss, ‘Interior Colonies: Frantz Fanon and the Politics of Identification’, in *Diacritics*, summer/autumn, 1994, pp. 20–42. See also Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998) p. 159-160.

Many contemporary artists have further neutralised the given frames of any cultural and national boundaries. How to curate them has been a question commonly asked, and new curatorial modes are required now. To this end, some curators have already started looking for new curatorial frameworks to interpret the complex and contradictory aspects of contemporary art. The second chapter will closely investigate some crucial curatorial attempts at discursive curating.⁹ For example, it will study Catherine David's *Documenta X* and her long-term project *Contemporary Arab Representations*, and Okwui Enwezor and six co-curators'¹⁰ *Documenta XI*, which have raised critical questions and discourses around the recent shifts in curating and issues of art and globalisation. The chapter claims that these exhibitions are aimed at tackling a single enunciated representation of art by including certain elements of discursiveness in an exhibition, which has made a significant impact on contemporary curating. As an example of the impact, the chapter explores some recent exhibitions; the Taiwan Pavilion, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*, curated by Esther Lu at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, and *The Chimurenga Library*, curated by Cape Town-based Chimurenga at the Showroom London in 2015. And also, throughout the chapter a few questions will be asked about this discursive curating; for example, 'Does the inclusion of discursiveness into an exhibition actually push the limits of conventional curating and present diverse narratives?', and more importantly, 'How can discursive exhibitions be evaluated?'

Based on these investigations, the latter half of the research - chapters III and IV - aims to suggest some possible concepts and curatorial modes. This part includes several theoretical studies and a closer examination into my own curatorial projects with Korean artists, alongside some in-depth research on their artistic subjectivities through interviews, seminars, discussions, and written texts. At first, the research explores translation theories, combining translation and curating in a shared practical sphere. From these studies, it will be demonstrated that curating practice can never be definitive since it always entails a level of failure and of untranslatability. This will be followed by the further question: 'How do we deal with this failure and untranslatability in curating?'

⁹ Paul O'Neill illustrates that since the late eighties, curating has generated a new discursive space around artistic practice, questioning the monographic presentation of artworks. And similarly, Mick Wilson uses the term discursive curating to explain recent practical and conceptual shifts in contemporary exhibition making. See Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse' in *The Biennial Reader*, pp. 240-260. See also Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', in *Curating Subject* (ed.), Paul O'Neill (London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2011) pp. 201-216.

¹⁰ Sarat Maharaj, Octavio Zaya, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez and Mark Nash.

Instead of dismantling the notion of untranslatability or failure in curating, my projects are more focused on adopting the untranslatable and shifting it to a 'dialogical space'. Here, the research follows the literary critic and philosopher Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin's notion of dialogism. In his work, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin insists that a literary work can express many different voices, unmerged into a single objective reading even though it is based on a single author's standpoint. According to him, a literary work can always involve a sense of the indefinable and unfinalisability, and it allows a space for dialogism where multiple understandings and experiences can appear.¹¹ Based on this theoretical approach, my projects are concretised with the question of how the notion of the untranslatable or failure can be taken and delivered within an exhibition, and how this practice can open up a dialogical space that pushes the limit of the enunciated and binary representation of Korean art.

For instance, it will see the exhibition *Map the Korea* (2012), which intentionally includes a grammatical error in its title to question the notion of ordinary language. It indicates that there is no common language in seeing and understanding contemporary Korean art by showcasing incommensurable differences between the featured artists, which are irreducible to any single national frame. In the exhibition, the viewers face multiple narratives of Korean art, and are asked to draw their own maps rather than follow a given itinerary. Subsequently, two consecutive projects *Penumbra: an 8-day Project with 8 Artists* (2012) and *After the Event* (2013) were carried out with the question of how an exhibition can play the role of a dialogical platform. In the process, instead of mounting an exhibition per se, the projects reconsider several governing factors in exhibition making, and then test how to displace them. They set various artistic subjectivities together within a shared space and time in order to open up different layers of communication with, and in-between, the artists and viewers. These relay-like projects are mostly process-based and open-ended; in the process, participants physically and artistically react to each other and interact with the given conditions, revealing a series of conflicts and negotiations between them. Lastly, the research will look into two of my recent projects: *Richard Smith* (2013) and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* (2014). Through the exploration of these projects, the chapter will illustrate the idea of fiction as a potential space where the notion of dialogical

¹¹ See Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, trans., Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984) See also, Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans., Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984)

curating can be further concretised. The projects are based on the written narratives of fictitious characters: Richard Smith and Eunsoo Hur. These fictional aspects are discussed in the chapter as one of my curatorial strategies for developing discursive curating with critical specificity, and as a critical subversion or radical re-signification of the problem inherent in the global art world. Furthermore, the chapter will argue that the imaginary space of fiction can raise more possibilities for the audience to be closely involved in the exhibitions.

Through those studies and reflections, the research demonstrates how my curatorial practices and related conceptions have been articulated. Moreover, the research clarifies a few key concepts in my practice, such as ambivalence, paradox, fiction, encounter and dialogue. Also, it is accompanied by close investigation into the problematic situation of the globalised art world; for example, its market system and the professionalism of art practice, illustrating that the kinds of problems that contemporary Korean art faces in the global environment are analogous to those of the broad art world. As indicated, all these discussions will be illustrated with real and specific case studies of contemporary Korean art, and this specificity of research will open up possibilities of generating more relevant and targeted discussion on contemporary curating.

I. Ambivalent Reading of Contemporary Art

1.1 Introduction

Within the process of globalisation, contemporary art has been through significant shifts and intricate patterns of (un)-assimilation into the world, and the subject of contemporary curating in accordance with it has become much wider than ever before. Many ideas and discourses on, for example, local/global, national, diasporic, identity and far more complex socio-political issues, have clustered around the globalised curating practice, so that at present, it seems almost impossible to discuss the practice as a whole. Therefore, instead of dealing with the ambiguous and gigantic discourses around contemporary curating and globalisation, it is necessary to look at more specific and substantive case studies. Consequently, this chapter will mainly discuss contemporary Korean art and the recent shifts in its practice and presentation for the last few decades, by linking them to the broad discussion of contemporary art and curating.

Accordingly, this chapter will revisit the written history of contemporary Korean art. The act of revisiting pre-written history might be conceived as limited because it would never fully explain a multitude of contemporary art; an art history can only illustrate a few aspects of art which can be compromised and fastened onto the construction of an historical narrative. Likewise, the history of Korean art is possibly being written based on the process of objectification and emphasisation. However, at the same time, revisiting the written history can reveal today's image of Korean art and where the image is being looted, and more importantly, how and in what sense it is being objectified and presented. In this respect, the chapter will look at both sides of the pre-written history of Korean art, and this ambivalent reading will be an important strategy for the chapter to develop a more adequate language and raise further questions on the practice of curating.

The logic of ambivalence in this chapter will admit agonistic and unresolved processes of reading, which will continually develop an argument to be addressed by sharing different aspects of Korean art rather than providing a sententious or exegetical study of it. By keeping its ambivalent structure both in its emergence and destination, the chapter will indicate that there are fissures in the current image of Korean art. Then, it will ask how the practice of contemporary curating can deal with the fissures, and what curatorial modes, conceptions, and logics of signification can be utilised in that practice.

1.2 Early Representation of Newness

As mentioned, history is always created under specific conditions; therefore, by looking at historical examples and their nexus with the present, it will be possible to develop a specific discussion relevant to the current situation. As a case in point, the exhibition, *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea* at Tate Liverpool in 1992, can be a vital historical example in thinking through the recent shifts in contemporary Korean art and its representation within the practice of contemporary curating.

The exhibition was one of the very early circulations of modern and contemporary Korean art in Western countries. It was co-organised with the National Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art in Korea, which presented the most dominant art forms in Korea during the 1970s and 1980s. It showcased Korean monochrome paintings, *Dansaekhwa*, (which literally means monochrome painting in Korean), by six Korean artists: Chang-Sup Chung, Hyong-Keun Yun, Kang-So Lee, Seo-Bo Park, Tschang-Yeul Kim, and Ufan Lee.

Dansaekhwa is rooted in a very different social and historical context, although the formal aspects of the works seemed similar to the post-war European and American paintings such as Art Informel and Abstract Expressionism. This particular group of *Dansaekhwa* artists were mostly born in the late 1920s and 1930s during the Japanese colonial period (1910 -1945), experienced the Korean War (1950 - 1953) in their student-years and the post-war society in adulthood.¹² In the history of modern Korean art, these artists are mostly regarded as the very first generation of Korean artists who faced the West and Western cultures during the period of the 1960s and 1970s. Before that, all cultural exchange had been carried out under the intervention of Japan. The very first Western impact on Korean art was Eurocentric modernism, imported via Japan during the colonial period. European Impressionism was the form of art settled in Korea in that time, however, it did so only in terms of stylistic imitation without any consideration of the social and historical backgrounds that brought it in the first place.

¹² Korea was liberated from Japan in 1945. After that, the country went through an extreme ideological conflict during the period 1945-48. At that time, the country was divided into the south and north, and the United States of America and the Soviet Union respectively occupied parts after the Second World War. This division has become permanent since 1953, after the Korean War (1950-1953).

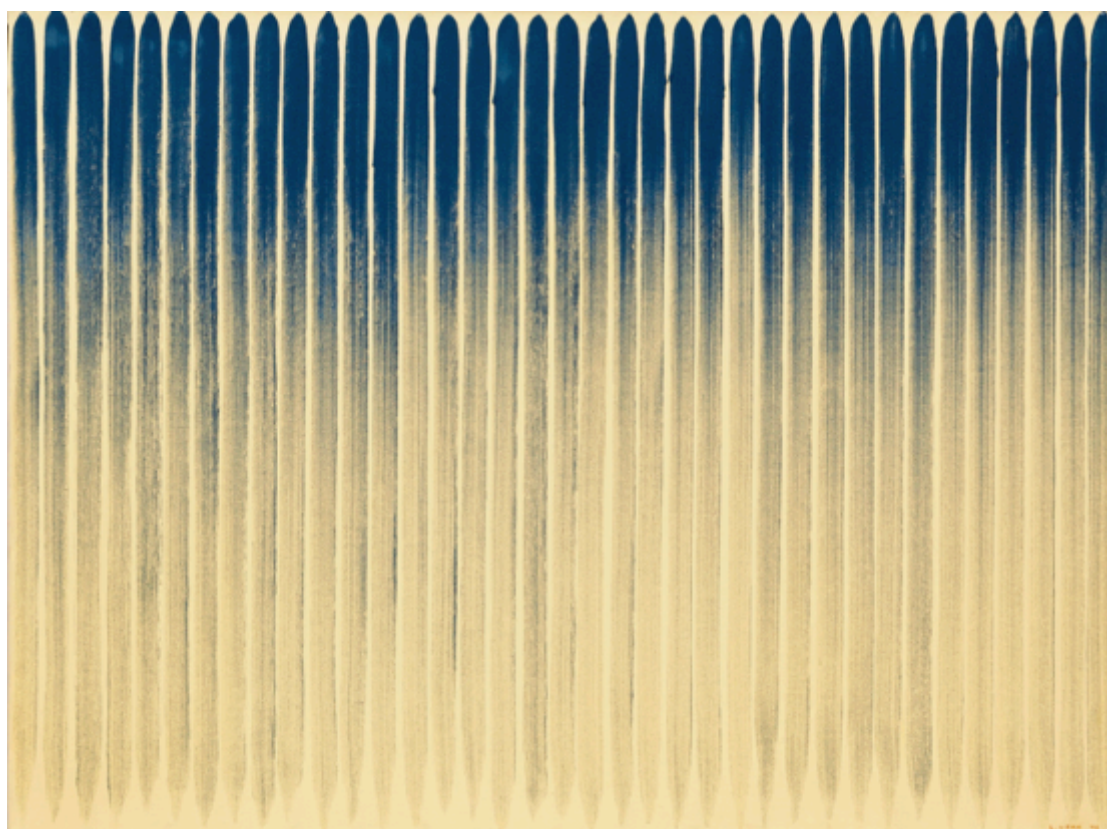


Figure 1: Seo-Bo Park, *Ecriture No. 89-79-82-83* (1983)

Figure 2: Ufan Lee, *From Line* (1974)

This stylistic imitation of imported modernism continued even after the Korean War, sustained by the country's cultural exchanges mostly with Japan. Within this very limited situation of society and culture, the *Dansaekhwa* artists had a feeling of dissatisfaction about the modernisation process of Korean art; accordingly, they wanted to open up a new phase of Korean art. In order to do so, the artists set themselves apart from the past with more direct interaction with Western modernism.¹³ The idea of spontaneity and the subjective expression of the art movements from post-war Europe and America were immediately adopted and then tested in different styles by the group of *Dansaekhwa* artists. The presented works in the exhibition *Working with Nature* could be seen as an example of this attempt; they showed a level of rejection of figurative painting – whether it derived from traditional oriental paintings or earlier Western art – in favour of simple, flat and repeated motifs with reductive gestures of individual styles (Figure 1, 2).

However, as the title *Working with Nature: Traditional Thought in Contemporary Art from Korea* illustrates, the presentation of *Dansaekhwa* within the exhibition was rather simplified and divorced from its complex social/cultural context. The introduction of the works was more focused on the supposed image of Korean art, bringing the exotic side of *Dansaekhwa* into the frame. The exhibition text described the works as follows:

Although to Western eyes much of the work will be seen to relate visually to *modernist* abstract painting, it in fact has roots in traditions of Korean culture. [...] The six artists have been selected because their work continues a Korean tradition of working with nature. The artists see their work, like themselves, as being *part* of nature, sharing its dynamics, and its textures. [...] In Korean thought, nature is not something separate or an unattainable ideal. It is the governing principle.¹⁴

It is true for some *Dansaekhwa* artists that they developed a more individual style of monochrome painting by adopting Korean traditions or possibly working with nature, which involved the use of calligraphic strokes, general pathos and contemplation of ink paintings. Even so, it can still be argued that the exhibition was very limited and one-sided,

¹³ In a round table debate hosted by the National Museum of Modern Art, artists Young-Kuk Yoo and Ufan Lee discussed the Korean art of that time. Although they expressed their concerns over the Westernisation of Korean art, they clearly indicated that Korean art had to face a new phase by directly interacting with the international art world. See Young-Kuk Yoo and Ufan Lee, 'Zadan' (Roundtable: contemporary Korean painting), *Gendai no Me* 165, August 1968, p 4.

¹⁴ Lewis Biggs, 'Working with Nature', in *Working with Nature: Contemporary Art from Korea*, exhibition catalogue, Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1992, pp. 8 – 13.

simply linking the works only with the nature and tradition of Korea, and eliminating complex social and historical contexts inherent in the works. Moreover, what the exhibition indicated as artistic forms of Korean tradition, such as the calligraphic strokes, self-contemplation, and the development of individual styles may also be seen as very typical aspects of Western abstract paintings.¹⁵

The question can be asked then: what other aspects of the works, apart from the exoticness, could have been presented and discussed through the exhibition. By the time the Korean monochrome paintings were showcased in the UK, there was already a level of controversy around the works in Korea, particularly on the question of their stylistic imitation of Western abstract paintings. For instance, the critic Kŭn-taek Pang criticised the blind reception of Western paintings among the *Dansaekhwa* artists, and argued that the artists should have refrained from accepting Western modernism. By contrast, the painter, Myeong-ro Yun, himself practicing abstract painting, urged on other Korean artists the need for accepting and studying Western art; he maintained that “as contemporary Korean art marked its start just after the Korean War, it has to persevere for another 480 years to be on the level with Western painting that has five hundred year history.” On the other hand, at the same roundtable discussion, the painter Se-ok Suh, who mainly worked with the medium of ink painting, cynically asked “whether it would be then the case that Western painting should persevere for thousands of years to catch up with Korean ink painting.”¹⁶

I believe that the exhibition *Working with Nature* was an opportunity to bring these discussions into a more international context. However, the exhibition did not present any of these artistic and social debates in any sense, nor the shared aspects with Western

¹⁵ East Asian philosophies have flowed into Western art since the 20th century. In particular, the idea of Zen was widespread from the 1940s to 1960s, and influenced Western art practices in, for example, its art of the empty field, calligraphic gesture, voidness, and so forth.

See Helen Westgeest, *Zen in the Fifties: Interaction in Art between East and West* (Michigan: Waanders Publishers, 1996) pp. 217–224. See also J J Clarke, *Oriental Enlightenment: The Encounter between Asian and Western Thought* (London: Routledge, 1997)

¹⁶ Joan Kee translated this round table discussion and explored it within her ‘Contemporaneity as Calculus: The View from Post-war Korea’ (2011). This chapter revisited the discussion based on Joan Kee’s translation. See Joan Kee, ‘Contemporaneity as Calculus: The View from Post-war Korea’ in *Third Text*, Vol. 25, Issue 5, September 2011, pp. 563–576. And for the original source, see Kŭn-t’aek Pang, ‘Mobang ūi hongsgugi: ch’usang hoehwa ūi munjejo’m’ (A flood of derivation: the problems of abstract painting), *Min’guk Ilbo*, 28 May 1962; Myeong-ro Yun, ‘Kukjejo’n ch’amyō ūi wa kū cho’nman’ (The significance of participating in the National Art Exhibition and future prospects), *So’ul midae hakbo*, vol 1, no 1, 1966, p. 41; and Se-ok Suh, ‘Kukjejo’n ch’amyō ūi wa kū cho’nman’, op cit, p. 41.

abstract painting. Instead, it presented the arts based on the binary frame of self and other, illustrating the works as a case of belatedness in some sense, of the periphery lagging. A former curator of Tate Liverpool, Lewis Biggs, illustrated the works:

The artists shared an interest in Shamanism, a belief that the artist is the Shaman of society. Although the formal traditions of Korea derive from Confucianism and Buddhism, and even while roughly half the population now professes Christianity, the most powerful and lasting beliefs in Korean society are shamanistic. [...] The art in this exhibition might be seen as representing this view and looking, in consequence, to the continuation of older traditions. [...] These are not images, not the produce of an imagination, because they are not intentional. They are made without drama, without the aspiration to make 'art' which informs almost all Western painting.¹⁷

The curatorial approach to *Dansaekhwa* was fully focused on the obviousness of otherness, or inventing the otherness without any attempt to reveal the conflicting narratives of the works, caught between tradition and modernity, and it resulted in another empty exhibition of stereotyped non-Western art in Western countries.

Here, it should also be noted that this problematic and empty presentation of the works derived not only from the West but also from inside Korea. From the 1970s, the South Korean government started promoting the country and its culture abroad. In the course of that, a number of exhibitions were held outside the country, mostly in Japan and some other European countries. For these government-oriented exhibitions, *Dansaekhwa* artists were invited most frequently for political reasons, which will be discussed later in the chapter. What should be indicated here is that these exhibitions showed a certain lack of curatorial depth, by labelling the works as representative of a national culture.

This limited presentation of Korean art might explain well why the Korean curator of the exhibition *Working With Nature* emphasised the need for looking at real narratives of the works and contextualising them within a broad sense, rather than categorising them into a national frame. Alongside the Lewis Biggs' text in the catalogue, the Korean curator Yil Lee argued in a very different voice:

What artists are deemed 'modernist'? Before answering this, we have to make a precise definition of what modernist art means in the context of modern Korean art. Unless we do this, modern Korean art becomes an orphan in international art

¹⁷ Lewis Biggs, 'Working with Nature', pp. 8 – 13.

history.¹⁸

The exhibition *Working with Nature* was also one of the government-oriented exhibitions, and it mostly evolved its representation of stereotypical Korean art with a clear aim of promoting the national culture, thus the Korean curator's assertion was not fully practiced in quality. Nonetheless, it can be seen that two different poles of presenting *Dansaekhwa* opposed each other, at least in the exhibition catalogue: one wanted to see the works within the process of objectification by making them into complete others and distinct from the rest; in contrast, the other wanted to present the works through the process of contextualisation by situating them within the broader art world. And these two very different strategies still raise a few questions for contemporary curating: whether the local/national state no longer functions within the practices of contemporary curating; whether contemporary curating has made progressive steps out of such a binary framework.

1.3 Contemporary Korean Art

The example of *Working with Nature* showed how the early representation of Korean art during the 90s was mostly rife with the act of indicating the obviousness of otherness. The question remains here: what has happened to contemporary Korean art and curating since then? To answer this question, it is essential to look at how the categorisation and presentation of otherness based on a nation-state have been shifting in contemporary art, and for that discussion, more examples of contemporary Korean art and exhibitions will be investigated here. In particular, with the study on Korean art since the 1990s, it will be possible to discuss whether contemporary art has overcome the dichotomy of East and West and shares the universal values, and also, whether the signs of cultural otherness are no longer recognised in Korean art exhibitions in the global art scene.

1.3.1 Rhetoric of Cultural Foreignness

Korean monochrome painting showed the very early attempts of Korean artists to contextualise their practices within a more global context overcoming the dichotomy of East and West. In this sense, they are often recognised as seminal figures in discussing the early internationalisation of Korean art. However, since these monochrome paintings at a certain level involved imitation of Western or Japanese modernism and superficial use of tradition, some Korean critics have indicated that it was in the late 1980s, after the

¹⁸ Lee Yil, 'On Working with Nature', op cit, p. 14.



Figure 3: Song-Dam Hong, *World Prosperity-I* (1984)

Figure 4: Seung-Taek Lee, *Wind-Folk Amusement* (1971)

regression of *Dansaekhwa* that contemporary Korean art found its own way.¹⁹

During the 1980s, while *Dansaekhwa* was still in the mainstream of Korean art, many art forms and subjects simultaneously emerged along with various political and social issues in Korea. The People's Art Movement, *Minjungmisul*, was the one that most vigorously heated these artistic changes in Korea. This movement was a participatory art initiative against the military government in the 1980s. Its participants asserted that art should use a figurative or narrative style to represent society and the realities of people, in particular, of the working classes and the poor (Figure 3). With a similar style to socialist realism, they attempted to disclose the hidden aspects of society to make people aware of the invasion of freedom and the unfair distribution of wealth under the military government. Also, not surprisingly, those within the People's Art Movement had a negative opinion towards the dominant monochrome paintings. They described the monochrome paintings as meaningless decorative wallpaper, which was over-institutionalised, Westernised and remained fatuously silent in the face of the military government.²⁰

This movement led to extreme conflicts in the Korean art scene at that time and raised aesthetical debates around modern Korean art. However, the Korean military government from 1961 to 1988 kept supporting the monochrome paintings for the reason of their silence on socio-political issues. As mentioned, art exhibitions around that time in Korea, especially the ones organised by the government, presented mostly monochrome paintings. In this circumstance, other radical art movements, such as the Korean Avant-garde Group (Figure 4)²¹ and *Minjungmisul* could hardly get any opportunities to showcase and develop their practices, which resulted in inevitable decline. Nevertheless, it should be emphasised that these movements in the 1980s marked a definitive break from the dominant monochrome paintings, and also, with their strong commentary on the socio-

¹⁹ Even though *Dansaekhwa* has shown different individual styles, there is a level of criticism towards the art for being derivative of European and American Art. See Young Chul Lee, 'Culture in the Periphery and Identity in Korean Art' in *Across the Pacific: Contemporary Korea and Korean-American Art*, exhibition catalogue, Queens Museum of Art, 1993, p. 11.

²⁰ Monochrome painters counter-attacked and accused *Minjungmisul* of being merely political propaganda with no artistic quality, which led to an extreme conflict between the art movements during the 1980s. The military government (Park Chung-Hee 1961 - 1979 and Chun Doo-hwan 1980 - 1988), however, tended to support Monochrome paintings only because the art focused on expressing calm and meditative harmony rather than commenting on any socio-political issues.

²¹ The Korean Avant-garde Group was established in 1969, but the group struggled to showcase their works due to the restriction, and declined mostly in the 1970s.

political situation in Korea, the movements at a certain level stimulated the next generation of Korean artists to test more diverse subject matters and artistic forms.²²

During the 1990s, right after the People's Art Movement and its extreme conflict with the Korean monochrome paintings, there was another drastic change in the Korean art scene as well as in the society and country at large. In 1993, South Korea's first civilian government took office²³ amid the country's economic boom that had accelerated in the 1980s. Since then, the civilian government implemented a liberal policy on foreign relations and international business; travel to foreign countries had been relatively restricted before, however, this changed in the 1990s and a large number of Koreans began travelling and working abroad; a number of artists also started studying and exhibiting in foreign countries.

Furthermore, the government embarked on diverse art and cultural projects: the National Museum of Contemporary Art opened in 1986, and the Whitney Biennial was held in Seoul in 1993. Additionally, the Gwangju Biennale, Asia's first international biennale for contemporary art, was held in 1995, and the Korean Pavilion at the Venice Biennale opened in the same year. From this point of time, Korean artists also started gaining a presence in the global art world through international art shows, biennales, and other forms of art events in Kassel, São Paulo, Moscow and Istanbul.²⁴ Also, at the same time, within the tide of globalisation, Korean art started rapidly absorbing contemporary Western philosophies, art theories, and art practices. During this shift, young artists willingly confronted the new trajectories and 'language of international art world',²⁵

²² See Youngna Kim, *20th Century Korean Art* (London: Laurence King Publishing Ltd, 2005)

²³ It was the first civilian government - started under President Kim Young-Sam - after the country's chaotic period: colonisation (1910 - 1945), Korean War (1950 - 1953), military dictatorship (1961 - 1988), and the Gwangju Democratic Uprising (1980).

²⁴ This development process is illustrated in detail in 'Koreans are White?' by J P Park. Park explains in the text that in this period of time, individual viewpoints and plural artist groups replaced a series of long-lasting monolithic artistic trend in Korea. See J P Park, 'Koreans are White?', in *Third Text*, vol. 27, Issue 4, August 2013, pp. 510-524.

²⁵ Gerardo Mosquera explains the art world with a linguistic metaphor. He links the global art world to the notion of international language and explores some possible ruptures inherent in the notion. My research, especially the chapter 3, also takes this linguistic metaphor in explaining contemporary art and my curating practice. See Chapter 3, and also Gerardo Mosquera, 'Alien-Own/Own Alien: Notes on Globalisation and Cultural Difference', in *Complex Entanglements* (ed.), Nikos Papastergiadis (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003) pp. 18-30.



Figure 5: Do-Ho Suh, *Reflection* (2004)

Figure 6: Do-Ho Suh, *Fallen Star 1/5* (2008-2011)

and it consequently led to diverse art forms and complex narratives, often conflicting and interfering with previous arts in Korea.

As Fredric Jameson observed during his visit, the country in this period of time was in a turbulent state, where the first, second and third worlds were coexisting and colliding, making a lot of contradictions and conflictions in world history.²⁶ However, despite the turbulent state of the country and the far more complicated narratives of artworks, the presentation of Korean arts in the global art scenes seemed to follow one very particular trend, characterised by the rhetoric of cultural identity, diaspora and nostalgia. This trend can be seen clearly from the Korean artists who gained international success at the time. For instance, Do-Ho Suh's installation series is undoubtedly one of the most spotlighted Korean artworks within that trend. In particular, the work *Reflection* (2004) is a full-scale reproduction of the traditional Korean gate in his childhood home in South Korea. The installation was constructed out of fabric; Suh used a transparent and light fabric so that it could be carried within a suitcase and unfolded in new locations (Figure 5). And it also reflected his personal memory of constantly moving from one city to another. Another installation work, *Fallen Star* (2008) also replicated a traditional Korean house, but this time the house was built in, realistic looking, and installed as if it had been lifted once and crashed into a Western-style building, signifying the moment of his arrival in foreign countries²⁷ (Figure 6).

Of course, this kind of foreignness and the artist's diasporic background are not the only qualities that made his works internationally successful. Nevertheless, it should be indicated that some other Korean artists, especially those who exhibited internationally at that time, including Kim Sooja (Figure 7) and Ikjooing Kang, shared the same rhetoric of cultural foreignness. These artists have been living in foreign cities for many years, mostly in New York and London, however, ironically, their works have been framed, presented, and celebrated within the very same rhetoric of otherness for a long time. Therefore, it can be argued that many non-Western artists are still recognised and evaluated through the creation of otherness or otherised differences. It is not their supposed otherness that creates all the interest in and quality of their works, yet it is surely problematic that their

²⁶ Nak-chung Baek, 'In an Interview with Fredric Jameson: Marxism, Postmodernism and the Nationalistic Cultural Movement' in *Changjak kwa Bipyo'ng*, Spring 1990, p. 291.

²⁷ Christine Starkman, 'Longing for Places Elsewhere: Kim Sooja, Do-Ho Suh, and Bahc Yiso' in *Your Bright Future: 12 Contemporary Artists from Korea*, exhibition catalogue, Los Angeles: LACMA, 2009, pp. 42–60.

marginality and cultural/national identity can be disguised as ‘artistic excellence’, and that the global art world still celebrates this ‘glamorised otherness’.²⁸ The question then becomes: why has this trend of presenting an otherness persistently continued within contemporary curating?

1.3.2 Market Logic

Regarding this question, some curators and artists have argued that the current system of exhibition making, or more specifically, its close relationship with the art market, can be held accountable for favouring and even encouraging the bias of contemporary art.²⁹ In particular, Hou Hanru, a Chinese-born international curator, has criticised the problematic system of international exhibitions and of commissioning artworks with examples of contemporary Chinese art at the conference held in the New Museum New York in 2012.³⁰ He argued that many contemporary Chinese artworks were commissioned for international exhibitions or for the big Western art market, while there was a relatively smaller art scene in China. Within the system, what the global art world has commissioned over the past few years has revealed the ugly cynical realism of contemporary Chinese art, and mostly ends up with easily chewable paintings in a very limited pattern of exhibitions. He further maintained that this system of curating and its operation within the art market hardly allowed any attention to the genuine art scene in China, but just to China itself, more precisely the China that they imagine and they want to have. Consequently, this system pushes the artists to manufacture a ‘Chinatown culture’³¹ that hardly bears any resemblance to reality in China, yet satisfies the cultural fetishism and exoticism demanded by the Western art market.

²⁸ Rasheed Araeen and Hal Foster also indicate similar problem. See Rasheed Araeen, ‘A New Beginning: Beyond Postcolonial Cultural Theory and Identity Politics’, in *Third Text*, vol. 14, Issue 50, 2000, pp. 3–20; Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996)

²⁹ Jean Fisher argues that curating today strategically spotlights foreign and exotic characteristics. And this trend in curating can be seen as related to the operation of the global art market. Jean Fisher, ‘Syncretic Turn: Cross-Cultural Practices in the Age of Multiculturalism’, in *Theory in Contemporary Art since 1985* (eds.), Zoya Kocur and Simon Leung (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013) p. 235.

³⁰ Hou Hanru, ‘The Curator’s Perspective’, Lecture, New Museum, February 4, 2012. In the lecture, Hanru mainly discussed problematic aspects of international exhibitions and some possible modes of curating beyond the idea of the ‘white cube’.

³¹ Wang Nanming, ‘Why We Should Criticize Xu Bing’s “New English Calligraphy” and Acknowledge Liu Chao’s “Machine Calligraphy”’, *Chinese-art.com*, vol 4, no 2, 2001, pp. 1–5.

The argument indicates that only a few Western centres operate the global art market, and this has an impact on art production and exhibitions. Also, it explains that Asian art is more vulnerable to this operation since the art scene is relatively small and is often isolated with limited sources from the local market. Statistical data would support this argument: in 2010 only three countries held over 80% of all fine art auctions, with a share of 33% for China, 30% for the US, 19% for the UK, 5% for France and the rest of the world sharing the remaining 13%. The data shows that the Chinese art market has grown astronomically, however, it should be noted that the Chinese market is hardly integrated nor does it impact on the global art scene; it mostly consists of Chinese artists purchased by Chinese buyers at auctions organised in China.³² On this basis, it seems clear that the global leaders of the art market are centred in the United States and Western Europe, and the activities by the rest fall far behind them. More specifically, Korea has only around 150 art galleries and just a 20-year history of an art market. The Korean art market grew mostly during the 1990s, but soon after, many systematic problems were revealed, with a series of forgery scandals and an unreliable art appraisal system.³³ In this situation, contemporary Korean art has naturally come to the Western art market. According to the research, local art sales in Korea in 2013 generated only 0.2% of total proceeds from fine art sales in the World.³⁴ This figure from the Korean local art market is tremendously small considering the high presence of contemporary Korean art in the international art scene.

Based on these statistics, it can be assumed that the sales of Korean art, or Asian art in a broad sense, are hugely reliant on the resources of the global art market. Thus, it can be observed how the works of Asian artists are being defined and presented in the global market, and how this presentation affects other art and curating practices. Here, the example of the recent *Dansaekhwa* boom in the global art market should give a detailed explanation. Most *Dansaekhwa* paintings – translated literally as monochrome paintings – are being sold in the United States and Western Europe through international auction

³² Stefano Baia Curioni, 'A Fairy Tale: The Art System, Globalization, and the Fair Movement' in *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets: A Report on Current Conditions and Future Scenarios* (eds.), Maria Lind and Olav Velthuis (Berlin: Stenberg Press, 2012) pp. 116-121.

³³ See Lee Woo-young, 'Why Is Korean Art Market Vulnerable to Forgery?', *The Korea Herald*, 21 June 2016, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20160621000657> (30 June 2016)

³⁴ See 'Overview of South Korea's art market', *Art Price*, 22 April 2014. <http://www.artprice.com/artmarketinsight/990/Overview+of+South+Korea+art+market> (22 April 2015).

houses and major commercial galleries such as Gagosian, Pace, White Cube, and so forth. Among the auction houses and commercial galleries, this group of *Dansaekhwa* artists are increasingly popular because most of the artists are alive and create works that are similar to Western minimalism, and therefore, their works can be an alternative to the most popular pieces on the market. Moreover, their works are underappreciated in the international art scene and therefore, they are affordable to bring to market, and more importantly, they can make high profit margins. This interest has already made an impact; the price of Seo-bo Park's paintings have surged sharply, ahead of his White Cube exhibition. According to auction data, one of his paintings in the series 'Ecriture', dated from the 1970s, was sold at auction in 2014 for \$55,432, and a work of comparable size and date was sold in 2015 for \$838,633.³⁵ Also other key *Dansaekhwa* artists, including Sang-Hwa Chung, Hyong-Keun Yun, and Chang-sup Chung, have all broken their auction records since some major commercial galleries started promoting their works. What should be pointed out in all this is that these centres of the global art market continuously invent their own selling points, based on the logic of a celebration of cultural foreignness. Having seen the recent *Dansaekhwa* exhibitions in London, for example, that of Seo-bo Park's in the White Cube and U-fan Lee's in the Lisson gallery, it can be easily seen that their works are still presented within a very limited cultural framework; oriental tradition, spiritual calligraphy, pure emptiness and Buddhist philosophy are the most frequently used terms to describe the works.³⁶ As foreign visitors and their otherness always comprise an essential part of international cities, these market centres always awaken interest in the new geo-aesthetics, in order to broaden their collections and bring more art investors to this potential gold mine.

The market system at a certain level operates with a wrongly directed ideology of internationalism, in which artworks remain just local and/or national in the end. What is more problematic is that with the recent withdrawal of public funding in a creative sector, the art market has now become the most dominant force driving the contemporary art

³⁵ Natasha Degen and Kibum Kim, 'The Koreans at The Top of The Art World', *The New Yorker*, 30 September 2015, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-koreans-at-the-top-of-the-art-world> (22 April 2016) See also, Rob Sharp, 'Korean Minimalism Is the Next Big Art Market Trend', *Artsy*, 16 January 2016, <https://www.artsy.net/article/artsy-editorial-korean-minimalism-is-the-next-big-art-market-trend-here-s-why> (22 April 2016)

³⁶ See 'Park Seo-No Ecriture' http://whitecube.com/exhibitions/park_seo-bo_masons_yard_2016/ (20 April 2016)

world, and market logic has invaded the territories of art making as well as curating.³⁷ Many curating practices related to Korean art today work on artworks that are already sanctioned by the market, since this can guarantee more funding opportunities from commercial galleries and other private sources. Thus, curating practice is easily restricted to object-oriented exhibitions without any further curatorial reflectivity or discursivity. For example, although there are many different Korean artists presenting diverse narratives, the Korean monochrome paintings, *Dansaekhwa*, a highly promoted Korean art with oriental representation in the art market, are the most frequently exhibited Korean art in the global art scene; not only the major commercial galleries, but also other art centres and international institutions such as the Tate, the Guggenheim Museum and the Venice biennale, have showcased the works. When the works are shown at these occasions, their supposed marginality is often disguised as artistic excellence. They are also armed with, or enhanced by, newly invented art histories and theories, and even some forged narratives and terms, e.g. the spirit of resistance and social activity, are randomly applied to this art.³⁸ Many English articles and books on *Dansaekhwa* have recently been published, coinciding with their presentation at major art institutions; their authors mostly have Korean cultural backgrounds, but use English as their native language. But there remain a lot of gaps between the cultures, with a superficial understanding of Korean art, brokering between two cultures, and finally backing up the problematic presentation of the works.³⁹ In this sense, it can be argued that it is not merely the art market but the bigger art world including contemporary curating that operate under this market-oriented mechanism of representation.

³⁷ Melanie Buchel, Marina Lopes Coelho and Silvia Simoncelli, 'A Question of Funding', *On-curating Issue 20*, <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-20-reader/interview-stockel-gillick-on-funding.html#.V8V-RhalJUQ> (20 April 2016) In the interview, Liam Gillick reflects on the present situation of diminishing public funding and on the growing impact of private money and the art market, and also, on its impact on the production of art exhibitions.

³⁸ As explored earlier in this chapter, the monochrome paintings remained mostly silent to the Korean military government. And for that reason of the silence on socio-political issues, the military government from 1961 to 1988 supported the monochrome paintings; art exhibitions around that time in Korea, especially the ones organised by the government, presented mostly monochrome paintings.

³⁹ For instance, a *Dansaekhwa* exhibition was curated as a collateral event of the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015, and along with the exhibition, a series of articles were published by international curators and scholars including Melissa Chiu, Director at the Smithsonian's Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C.; Doryun Chong, Chief Curator at M+ Museum in Hong Kong; Joan Kee, Associate Professor at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; Lewis Biggs, Chairman of Institute for Public Art in Hong Kong; Mika Yoshitake, Assistant Curator at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden; and a few others. See <http://www.venice-dansaekhwa.com> (1 June 2015)

1.3.3 Heteronomous Art Making

It has been discussed that market logic has become the most dominant force in the art world, invading the territories of art and curating practice. Also, by exploring recent statistical data and the example of the Korean art boom in the global art market, research indicates that Asian art, in particular Korean art, can be more vulnerable to this market-oriented system and its representational exhibition making. Of course, this market driven situation would be discussed, not only in Korean art but also in the broader context of contemporary art. The global art world over the past few decades has been transformed into almost an entertainment industry. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer noted long ago in their book, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in 1944,⁴⁰ the art world has been structured mostly with popular cultural events and festivals or easily verifiable projects, leaving its right to the market. In this situation, individual dealership is becoming powerful and it even intertwines closely with museums and public institutions which people normally think of as un-constrained and un-tethered to the market. Today, it can be easily seen that due to recent cuts to funding, some public museums collaborate with multinational mega galleries in mounting an exhibition in order to reduce exhibition budgets. Here, the galleries present their own artists at museum quality exhibitions, enhancing an artist's CV, which of course will increase the possibility of sales. In this process of providing a financial breathing space, the galleries would get actively involved with a range of museum practices such as exhibitions, collecting, publications and public programmes.⁴¹

This situation does not seem to have any closed geographical boundaries, as the centres attempt to extend their hegemony all over the world. Some mega commercial galleries have opened branches in the Middle East and Asian cities such as Abu Dhabi, Hong Kong, Shanghai, Beijing and Seoul; Art Basel also established a presence in Hong Kong and

⁴⁰ The term culture industry was coined and presented as critical vocabulary in the chapter "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception", of the book *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. See Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (Trans.), John Cumming (London: Verso, 1997)

⁴¹ Melanie Buchel, Marina Lopes Coelho and Silvia Simoncelli, 'A Question of Funding', *On-curating Issue 20*, <http://www.on-curating.org/index.php/issue-20-reader/interview-stockel-gillick-on-funding.html#.V8V-RhalJUQ> (20 April 2016) In the interview, Tommy Stöckel tells of an incident where a provincial German museum asked a Berlin gallerist to organize their shows, since the museum was unable to raise funds to produce exhibitions.

See also, Kelly Crow, 'The Gogosian Effect', *The Wall Street Journal*, 1 April 2011, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748703712504576232791179823226> (12 April 2016)

Christie's and Sotheby's started working with Asian auction houses in 2007. Regarding this situation of the global art world, Maria Lind has stated in her *Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets* that:

Complex and thought provoking art is having a harder time than ever, not only to come about but also to circulate beyond an already converted audience. Entertaining and easily digestible art is becoming more and more prevalent in the public eye, almost synonymous with art itself. These developments are closely connected with new power and economic dynamics in the wake of globalisation.⁴²

Of course, money is not the only thing constructing the art world. Only a small part of the art world may experience this money and glamour. But as explored, market logic is certainly becoming a massive factor, controlling the global art world and leaving less space for experimental art. At times, it even tempts contemporary artists to produce artworks reactively and strategically in order to persuade the market and gain visibility within it. Artists openly act like businessmen promoting a product and might make a work of art based on particular spatial and temporal contexts of the market. Thus, their works stay true to the market's most saleable medium, almost exclusively painting, and the works, especially by non-Western artists, often end up with self-otherised narratives. Referring to this kind of art making, art theorist Isabelle Graw expressed her concerns, stating that "Pierre Bourdieu's definition of the art world as relatively autonomous should be substituted with relatively heteronomous"⁴³ in the art world today.

The annual exhibition, *Korean Eye*, shown at the Saatchi Gallery since 2009, can be cited as an example of heteronomous art practice. One might argue that an exhibition at a commercial gallery is not an appropriate example to discuss contemporary curating, because it would already be object-oriented rather than context-oriented. However, as discussed, certain commercial galleries can have great influence on the development of art, not just the direction of the market⁴⁴ but also establishment of the canon. Furthermore, the exhibition is the most significant and probably the only art exhibition in the UK

⁴² Maria Lind, 'Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets', pp. 7-16.

⁴³ Isabelle Graw, 'In the Grip of the Market? On the Relative Heteronomy of Art, the Art World, and Art Criticism', pp. 183-208.

⁴⁴ Terry Smith, 'Shifting the Exhibitionary Complex', in *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (Winnipeg: The Prolific Group, 2012) pp. 58-99.



Figure 7: Kim Sooja, *Bottari Truck – Migrateurs* (2007)

Figure 8: Chan-Hyo Bae, *Existing in Costume - Beauty and the Beast* (2009)

presenting a group of Korean artists, thus, it would be worth discussing, at least in terms of looking at what sort of images and vocabularies the exhibition and artworks are involved with.

The exhibition is the largest survey show of contemporary Korean art in the UK, showcasing a group of Korean artists who have recently emerged on to the global art scene. In particular, for the 2012 edition, thirty-three Korean artists were selected from a list of two thousand artists who had entered over 28,000 works for consideration.⁴⁵ However, selected works of these thirty-three artists proved that what the exhibition aimed for was no more than an international ‘sales of work’, a ‘sale of trading units’.⁴⁶ The works were to promote fake contexts of different modernity or culture in general, ratifying them to the process of economic integration: the themes of cultural identity or exotic stories of Asia, for instance, of porcelain, transformed vases, and Confucianism were still the most popular subjects in the exhibition.

Also, some artists in the exhibition showed a level of heteronomous art making based on the means of self-exoticism. For example, an artist Chanhyo Bae exhibited a series of photographs, *Existing in Costume*, taken from a costume play with the artist himself dressing up as a British noblewoman (Figure 8). The artist explained “after I arrived in England I realised that as an Asian man there are many restrictions on entering Western society ... and also that the East has a feminine image. In response to this feeling, I have decided to become a British noblewoman just as a child pretending to be a mother by dressing in her clothes and making up with her cosmetics.”⁴⁷ As seen from this explanation, the works showed an attempt at identity change, but within the rather shallow means of costume play; moreover, its whole development was problematically based on self-peripheralisation, which never wishes to challenge the given frames, but resides in it to secure visibility. Likewise, the curatorial statement of *Korean Eye: Moon generation* also indicates this problematic stance of self-peripheralisation:

⁴⁵ Nichola Anthony, ‘Korean Eye 2012’, *Trebuchet Magazine*, 31 July. 2012, http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/current/korean_eye_reviews.htm (22 Feb 2013).

⁴⁶ Jimmie Durham, ‘A friend of mine said that art is a European invention’, in *Global Visions: Toward a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts* (ed.), Jean Fisher (London: Third Text Publications, 1994), p. 118.

⁴⁷ Chanhyo Bae, *Existing in Costume*, Solo Exhibition Catalogue, London, 2009

Globalisation has fuelled cultural exchanges between the East and the West. Asian contemporary art is rapidly moving from peripheral to global stages... However, Korea still remains a divided country in the eyes of the Western World... The exhibition *Moon Generation* is, therefore, an opportunity to develop the West's perception of dynamic Korean Contemporary Art.⁴⁸

The statement simplifies the globalising process of Korean art as if it has been moving from the periphery to the centre, and here it considers the Western art world as the main stage on which Korean art has to take part or be offered a place. Not surprisingly, this approach to Korean art resulted in the self-orientalising theme of 'Moon' and its sub-themes of Life and Death with Yin and Yang and the Five Elements. These themes may indicate some traditional aspects of the country and Eastern culture, but it would hardly illustrate any real contexts of contemporary Korean art. It would simply frame the artists as fixed others and those from outside, and present objectified subjectivities to the hegemony of Western culture.

This strategic art/exhibition making might give artists/curators a space for presenting their works on the international level; however, it often taxidermies and objectifies not only their works, but also their subjectivities and broader cultures by abusively appropriating them as a commodity. In this process, they are always recognised as a group from outside the dominant world, asked to bring their marginalised subjectivities into the mainstream frame. Moreover, they are only given assigned spaces to present their practice without any sense of autonomy. Therefore, the heteronomous art-making can never take itself out of the given spaces of categorisation, but can only play a subordinate roles in it.

1.4 Artistic Subjectivities beyond National Identity

A few Korean artists and exhibitions have been explored to consider whether the attention to the obviousness of otherness has been eroded or negated in contemporary curating.⁴⁹ And it has also been discussed that the signs of otherness in curating still function in cooperation with the market logic of the global art world. In this situation, a vicious circle has been formed: an artist strategically produces artworks, secretly cooperating with the

⁴⁸ Joon Lee, 'The Diverse Spectrum of Korean Contemporary Art', in *Korean Eye: Moon Generation*, exhibition catalogue, The Saatchi Gallery, London, 2009

⁴⁹ A similar question has been asked in Documenta 11, and my research discusses the exhibition, particularly its curatorial framework in chapter 2. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Globalisation and Democracy', in *Democracy Unrealised, Documenta 11 Platform 1* (eds.), Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, and Octavio Zaya (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2002) p. 323.

problematic representation; the art market promotes his/her otherness, and gives the artist an international recognition; the artist acquires the power in the global art scene, and distributes the works through many international art events. Consequently, this circle leaves only a little margin for complex and thought provoking art.

Nonetheless, even in this problematic system, some Korean artists illustrate more complex narratives and subjectivities beyond the characterised themes of Korean identity and culture. Their works hardly fit into any pre-drawn patterns, or have characteristics that would point to Korea as their origin. In particular, Haegue Yang, living and working in Berlin and Seoul, can be discussed here as one of the most prominent artists who further neutralises the supposed image of contemporary Korean art. For example, the work *Storage Piece* (2004) that Yang made for the exhibition *Alterity Display* at the Lawrence O'Hana Gallery in London has dealt with the more complex issues of the global art world without relying on the typical cultural specificity of Korea. While the artist was staying in London in 2003, she was asked to participate in the exhibition *Alterity Display*. At that time, however, Yang was coping with an extensive amount of work, due to her exhibitions being simultaneously held in different cities; for example, she had to remove her works from several museums in different cities and restore them, but she lacked a storage space, and was even facing financial difficulty since she had to produce a number of new works and handle them afterwards; therefore, creating a new work would only have exacerbated the situation.

For the exhibition *Alterity Display*, she made the work *Storage Piece* by reflecting on this situation and bringing it into public discussion: she packed dispersed artworks and remnant objects from her previous installations and stacked them on the four euro pallets. All the works and objects yet to be sold and that had nowhere to be stored were wrapped and packaged as if they were meant to be removed from the gallery space (Figure 9). The selected objects/works included: five fans from *Adopting Proportion* (de Appel Foundation, Amsterdam, 2003), metal shelves on a wooden ramp from *Air and Water* (Manifesta 4, Frankfurt/main, 2002), a stack of plastic bottle crates from *Tilting on a Plane* (Korean Culture and Arts Foundation, Seoul, 2002), as well as paper collages, photographs, and many others from previous works.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ The information about the work is mainly from exhibition catalogues and the artist's webpage. See Haegue Yang, *Arrivals: Haegue Yang* (ed.), Yilmaz Dziewior (Bregenz: Kunsthau Bregenz, 2011) See also <http://www.heikejung.de/content.html> (5 May 2015)



Figure 9: Haegue Yang, *Storage Piece* (2004)

Figure 10: Sung Hwan Kim, *From the Commanding Heights* (2007)

After the show *Alterity Display* in London, *Storage Piece* was sold at the Art Forum 2005 in Berlin, and Haegue Yang transferred the work's authorship to the collector. Then, unpacking was performed by the owner together with the artist. After that, the work, born from necessity and embodying the artist's critical view on the system of global exhibition circulation, toured different exhibition spaces repeating the process of packing, unpacking and shipping. For instance, it appeared at *Made in Germany* at Kestnergesellschaft, Hannover in 2007, the 27th São Paulo biennial *How to Live Together* in 2006 and several other international exhibitions.

As described, the work reveals a story of collision between deficiency, duty and desire that any contemporary artist could possibly experience, avoiding superficial presentation of an artist's personal and cultural specificity. It also opens many discussion points in terms of the art market, authorship, possession of art, and the circulating and commissioning of artworks that operates throughout the global art world.

Another Korean artist, Sung Hwan Kim also presents works beyond the pre-conceived image of Korean art. He recently showcased a series of films, performances, and installations at many international art events: the 5th Berlin Biennale in 2008, Manifesta 8 in 2011, The Tanks at Tate Modern in 2012, and Gwangju Biennale in 2014. The recent works in part explore the artist's cultural and subjective narratives, but these soon mixed with different fantasies, myths and rumours, presenting far more complicated narratives or non-narratives that overthrow some possible frames and vocabularies that viewers might have, or be expected to have from his background.

For example, *From the Commanding Heights* (2007) tells a rumour about a South Korean dictator of the 1970s; the dictator regularly blacked out an entire neighbourhood to visit his mistress, a famous actress living in the same apartment where Kim's parents used to live. While it illustrates the rumour with his parents' voice, the film abruptly shifts to another scene where the artist leans over a transparent screen placed above the camera lens. In the scene, Kim, like a storyteller, describes a woman he used to know and her features through his own drawing and voice. He illustrates that the woman had a third ear on her forehead, so she had to put her finger to cover it when it rained. In the same track, Kim also demonstrates another woman whose throat was filled with snakes. The snakes

used to live inside the woman's body, but one day she bit all their heads off, so only bodies remained lodged in her throat.⁵¹

In this work, each narrative moves freely, and over-layering one another. Similar to 60s underground film, the scenes are filled with vertiginous camera angles and underexposed or overexposed footage, layering the artist's voice and drawing (Figure 10). The work in general overturns or plays with what is being expected in telling a story, by fragmenting a narrative into many pieces, and keeping them together in play. As a result, the work carries its content, images, and narratives simultaneously, but all of them are always in their own volatility, so hardly caught in comprehension. In this art making, the viewers' expectations towards the artist collapse and proceed to another stage of assimilation.⁵²

Minae Kim is also one of the Korean artists who present complex narratives of subject matter. Kim often reflects on architectural spaces and physical surroundings in her site-specific sculpture/installations in order to illustrate contradictions and limits in the given conditions of the art system and society in general. For example, in her recent works such as *Rooftoe* (2011), *Distant Stairway* (2011), and *Link* (2010), she has built a series of architectural dialogues between the given space and her intervention. In particular, for *Link*, she made a set of symmetrical movable structures pointing to each other, which are tightly fitted between two opposing walls in an exhibition space; for *Rooftoe* (Figure 11), a tall steel structure attached to the existing ceiling structure with a red wheel on the bottom; and for *Distant Stairway*, a wooden handrail at a height on the outer wall of an exhibition space that no one can reach. As seen from these works, she regularly uses metaphorical objects to draw a scene of contradictory situations. A wheel is one of the most frequently used objects for its (non)-functionality in her work: it has a nature of movability but is fixed and subordinated to the given spaces of her installations. With these objects, she illustrates interaction and contradiction between space and object, white-cube and site-specific intervention, and society and herself.⁵³

Apart from these artists, there are many other contemporary Korean artists who break through the existing stereotypes of Korean art and push themselves further beyond the

⁵¹ Sung Hwan Kim, *Talk and Song* (Seoul: Samuso, 2014), pp. 25-43.

⁵² Author interview with Sung Hwan Kim, artist, 6 November 2013

⁵³ Author interview with Minae Kim, artist, 31 March 2013

limited vocabularies of given categorisation. Their national and cultural identity as Korean, although perhaps adding a nuance to their works, does not circumvent or lessen the impact of the works and their overall quality. These artists are directly involved with matters in contemporary art, without any collusion with the forged issues of national culture and identity; they are interested in the current situation itself, not as Koreans nor in the expected gender roles, but as artists who are in the centre of their own concerns.

1.5 Curating Paradox

I have shown that a number of Korean artists produce and present their works in ways that hardly fit into the existing curatorial framework. In this regard, the questions should be asked: how can the practice of contemporary curating expand its vocabularies to present these artists, and what curatorial modes and conceptions might be adopted for that practice?

Regarding the question of the possible curatorial modes, one might argue that no kind of cultural or national category, no matter whether real or fake and valid or invalid, should be imposed on a work of art. It sounds rather extreme, but a similar goal was actually pursued in the exhibition, *Elastic Taboos within the Korean World of Contemporary Art* at the Le Consortium art centre in Dijon, France in 2007. The curators of the exhibition, Franck Gautherot and Seung-duk Kim stated that these artists should not be represented with any nation-based themes and stories because the individual works of the artists cannot be illustrated with any collectivised viewpoint; the specificity of the works and the stories behind them are far beyond the context conferred by national/cultural identity.⁵⁴

However, a question can be asked about this curating: how would it be possible to consider the artists and their practices as entirely individual and independent from any collectivised culture: their works must have contained a level of socio-historical contexts of their nation/cultural background. In this respect, one might argue that an exhibition should provide a confined but sufficient ground for acknowledging the relationships between the individuals and broader culture, and even with a nation if relevant. This critique towards forms of curating which exclude any nation-based context seems to indicate some balanced argument. However, this can be a double-edged sword; curating with cultural contexts can surely create some discussion points and links with the work of

⁵⁴ Seung-duk Kim and Franck Gautherot, 'Our Own Private Korea', in *Elastic Taboos: Within the Korean World of Contemporary Art* (eds.), Seung-duk Kim and Franck Gautherot (New York: Distributed Art Pub Incorporated, 2007) pp. 46–60.

art, yet this kind of curating hardly moves ahead on its own trajectory. Moreover, there is a tendency in this kind of curatorial mode to overly adjust the works of art to a specific history or tradition, differentiating the works from the rest of possible grounds.⁵⁵

So would it be better to ignore any nation-based viewpoint and focus on individuality? It should be considered that it would be very limited and even problematic to present a group of contemporary Korean artists solely based on the logic of individualism. This is because the notion of individuality can be applied to almost every contemporary artist in the global art world by relying on its conceptual ambiguity. Individuality, in fact, is not a visible or inherent difference, but more like a tool that appears to confirm the difference.⁵⁶ Therefore, the idea of individuality can hinder further thoughts and struggles, as it can turn itself into a tool for managing and keeping a difference in a separated cell.

To be specific, several artists discussed earlier do not work with any visible cultural specificity; they neither address their cultural/national identity nor work on any Asian traditions. Within the logic of individualism, this lack of cultural specificity can become a form of artistic individuality, and once accepted and circulated within the global art world, the individuality can function as another identity marker. In this process of individualisation, in the worst case, these artists might become no more than un-Korean Korean Artists or un-Asiatic Asian Artists; as this process does not ask any questions, therefore, no further discussions are necessary, but only a separated cell of individuality.

In this respect, it can be argued that it does not make any sense to choose between two extremes of curatorial mode: the nation-based viewpoint and the logic of individualism. This is because both of them are just two different sides of the same drive towards the conventional practice of difference-management.⁵⁷ Both operate based on the logic of sameness, within which the difference is entertained or grasped through the practice of

⁵⁵ The discussion was initially developed by J. P. Park, questioning both arguments: Korean artists should not be represented with any collectivised view points; in contrast, the artists should be presented by acknowledging their relationships with broad culture. See J P Park, 'Koreans are White?', pp. 510-524. See also Youngmin Moon, 'The Politics of Curating Contemporary Art for Audience Abroad', in *Contemporary Art in Asia: A Critical Reader* (ed.), Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011) pp. 227-228.

⁵⁶ Carolyn Dean and Dana Leisohn, 'Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America', *Colonial Latin American Review* 12, no 1, 2003, p. 19.

⁵⁷ Sarat Maharaj, 'Dislocutions', in *Re-verberations: Tactics of Resistance, Forms of Agency in Trans/cultural Practices* (ed.), Jean Fisher (Limburg: Jan van Eyck Editions, 2000) pp. 35 – 36.

management or celebration. Instead, what contemporary curating needs to do is constantly move from one to the other, keeping tensions between the fissures of contemporary art, and bringing more accurate questions and subject matter out of them.

1.6 Conclusion

With these examples of contemporary Korean art and their presentations in the global art scene, it has been shown that many contemporary art and curating practices operate under the dominant economic models of globalisation, leaving a smaller margin for autonomous practice. Even in this situation, however, contemporary artists have shown a variety of signs of difference with greater complexity of cultural, artistic and subjective matters, indicating that any conventional curating based on the binary practice of management and celebration will never grasp and present their practices effectively.

In accordance with this argument, the research asked how the practice of contemporary curating can challenge the limited vocabularies of Korean art, and also, what curatorial modes and conceptions can be utilised in order to expand its practical frameworks for presenting more diverse and thought-provoking artworks. This enquiry may sound paradoxical since the question itself already resides in the problems. More specifically, it accepts the term Korean and uses it as situated, and also calls for a certain form of curatorial approach, although it questions the limits or dis-functions of curating in the market-driven global art world. But here, it should be noted that the research evolves with the notion of ambivalence, both in reading the term Korean art and developing a curatorial mode with the aim of keeping it within the area of questioning and debate, and subsequently, developing more adequate languages.

Therefore, the notion of ambivalence is essentially important as a curatorial conception in my research project. Giorgio Agamben has illustrated in his *What is the Contemporary?* that the state of being contemporary is out of joint with its time, and this state of being out of joint tends to apply not only to the world tomorrow, but also to the world yesterday.⁵⁸ According to him, being contemporary is not about living today, but more about reflecting and questioning it and keeping an ambivalent stance towards it. I believe this reflective and ambivalent understanding of the contemporary will be able to explain some general

⁵⁸ Giorgio Agamben, 'What is the contemporary?', in *What is an apparatus?* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2009) pp. 39-54.

conditions, constructions, and receptions of my curatorial practice.

My curating practice may not be able to find any definitive answer to the question that this research project asks, because it is already – should be – a part of the problem. Therefore, what my curating aims to ask is how far it can take this paradox of being contemporary and still keep its ambivalent state to challenge and expand itself. The dilemma of curating contemporary Korean art remains how to present the works without betraying their multiple contexts, and also to avoid being caught in consumable and exotic signs of otherness.⁵⁹ In this sense, it can be argued that this curating practice should not be ‘representing definitive signs’, but bringing a ‘reflective and revisionary space’ that explores multiple narratives and experiences, pushing the limits of the situated notion of Korean art.

⁵⁹ Jean Fisher, ‘Some Thoughts on Contaminations’, in *Third Text*, Vol. 9, Issue 32, 1995, pp. 3-7.



Figure 11: Minae Kim, *Roof toe* (2011)

II. Discursive Curating

2.1 Introduction

In the first chapter, the discussion of the specifics of contemporary Korean art has shown that the work of contemporary artists presents great variety. Thus, any conventional curatorial framework based on cultural hegemony or binary divisions will only reveal its limitations. In this context, I have asked how contemporary curating can grasp and present this diversity, and argued that the practice of curating should not be representing definitive signs, but opening up a discussion that gives rise to multiple narratives and experiences.

With the aim of curating a discursive⁶⁰ exhibition, some contemporary curators have been testing different curatorial modes. Their practices explore different exhibition formats along with various social contexts, ideas, and subject matters, instead of inscribing certain limitations and definitions of what an exhibition should be like. And this discursive logic and its open formats question and even dismantle what is already known and situated, for instance, identity, culture, and many other pre-given frames.

This chapter will look closely at some of these curatorial attempts. In particular, it will examine Catherine David's curatorial projects *Documenta X* and *Contemporary Arab Representations*, and also, Okwui Enwezor and six co-curators⁶¹ *Documenta XI* to discuss early developments in discursive curating. It will also look into how this idea of discursive curating has evolved through recent curatorial practices with the example of a geographical exhibition within a global setting; the Taiwan Pavilion, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion* curated by Esther Lu at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 and *The Chimurenga Library* curated by Cape Town-based Chimurenga at the Showroom London in 2015. In doing so, the chapter will further discuss recent conceptual and practical turns in contemporary curating, illustrating the foundation of my own curatorial practices with contemporary Korean artists.

⁶⁰ The term 'discursive' has been applied by Mick Wilson to the recent curatorial paradigm that puts a sense of conversation at the centre of its exhibitionary activity. In particular, Wilson explores Catherine David's *Contemporary Arab Representations* in explaining the paradigm shift. This later part of this chapter closely investigates this discursive paradigm of contemporary curating. See Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', in *Curating Subject* (ed.), Paul O'Neill (London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2011) pp. 201-216.

⁶¹ The co-curators are Sarat Maharaj, Octavio Zaya, Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez and Mark Nash.

2.2 Expansion of Curating Practice

Contemporary curators have been expanding the scope of their curatorial practice with the belief that the ‘conventional framework’ discussed in the previous chapter is not sufficient to grasp the complexity of contemporary art. For instance, French curator, Catherine David’s practice indicates that the fluidity and complexity of contemporary art cannot be represented by any single enunciated mode of curating. Her practices - *Documenta X* and *Contemporary Arab Representations* – were more like ever-shifting and dynamic clusters; they intentionally avoided any fixed representation of artworks, and instead created discursive spaces for public conversation, debate, and meeting within and around the exhibitions.

This idea of discursive curating is something that David has been interested in for the past few decades from her very early career. Regarding this, many practitioners and theorists indicate that David’s practice has left a significant impact on the development of contemporary curating, especially in terms of bringing about recent ‘discursive turns’⁶² in curating. Taking her curatorial practices as an axis can serve to illuminate how the idea of discursive curating has been shaped from its early development to its recent influences on curating.

David once made it clear that her early involvement with the idea of discursive curating came about with her career at the Centre Pompidou Paris from 1981 to 1990.⁶³ During the 1980s, when David held her curatorial position, the Centre Pompidou developed an innovative model of a large-scale interdisciplinary institution. In fact, the institution was immediately considered as innovative when it first opened in 1977 due to its open-plan architecture. Its overall plan was based on a not quite post-modern, but a more utopian idea of a ‘democratic’⁶⁴ institution where pluralistic approaches to visitors and operations of the institution could mingle.⁶⁵

⁶² Mick Wilson, ‘Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns’ pp. 201-216.

⁶³ Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier (eds.), *Politics-Poetics: documenta X the Book* (Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1997) p. 9.

⁶⁴ The idea of democracy is important in illustrating the discursive turn in curating since many curators work with the idea. For instance, Okwui Enwezor indicates that developing a democratic framework is essential in curating because spectatorship can only function within that system. See Okwui Enwezor ‘The Black Box’, in *Documenta 11 Platform 5: Exhibition: Catalogue* (eds.), Enwezor, Okwui et al (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002) pp. 42-55.

⁶⁵ The concept of the institution was multi-functional, and it combined the Musée National d’Art Moderne (the MNAM) with other institutions: a public reference library (the Bibliothèque Publique

In order to comprehend the climate of the Centre Pompidou around that time, two representative exhibitions *Les Immatériaux* (1985) and *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) can be explored here, mainly sketching their curatorial strategies rather than describing small details. Discussing these two exhibitions might be seen as outdated and far distant from what one might think of as contemporary curating, however, they are the seminal ones in term of tracking David's initial involvement with the idea of discursive curating, and also, of studying an authorial shift in curating which has left a great impact on today's discursive mode of curating.

The exhibition *Les Immatériaux*, organised under the interdisciplinary exhibition programme with other four institutions, has pushed the practice of curating forward in a number of ways. Above all, as French art critic Nathalie Heinich explained in her paper *Les Immatériaux Revisited: Innovation in Innovations* (2009), the exhibition was a catalyst in opening up the role of a curator not just as a 'museum conservator', but rather as an 'author'.⁶⁶ With a much larger set of exhibition components, ranging from traditional paintings and sculptures, to the texts, sounds and other technical artefacts, the principal curator Jean-François Lyotard took the exhibition as an artwork in its own right,⁶⁷ and brought his philosophical exposition into it.

The exhibition was more focused on opening up philosophical discussions than merely presenting the art objects. Lyotard introduced five themes with five paths through the exhibition;⁶⁸ however, these paths were open and connected to each other to create an intersecting atmosphere. There was no imposed itinerary for viewing the exhibition, so

d'Information, or BPI), an architecture and design centre (the Centre de Création Industrielle, known as the CCI), and a laboratory for contemporary music (the IRCAM). Based on this structure, the institution tested different ways of exhibition making in its early decades, starting from the director Pontus Hultén's major interdisciplinary exhibition series, *Paris-Berlin*, *Paris-New York*, *Paris-Moscow* and *Paris-Paris*. See Bruce Altshuler (ed.), *Biennials And Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History*, (London/New York: Phaidon Press, 2013) pp. 215 - 226.

⁶⁶ Nathalie Heinich, 'Les Immatériaux Revisited: Innovation in Innovations', *Tate Paper Issue 12* (published online 1 October 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/les-immatériaux-revisited-innovation-innovations> (accessed 2 May 2015)

⁶⁷ Bruce Altshuler (ed.) *Biennials And Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History*, p. 215.

⁶⁸ For further details, see Jean-François Lyotard, 'Les Immatériaux', *Art and Text*, April 1985. See also John Rajchman, 'Les Immatériaux or How to Construct the History of Exhibitions', *Tate Paper Issue 12* (published online 1 October 2009) <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/les-immatériaux-or-how-construct-history-exhibitions> (accessed 2 May 2015)

visitors could take their own trajectory through a labyrinth of many possible routes⁶⁹ (Figure 12, 13). Furthermore, unlike other exhibitions of that time, *Les Immatériaux* did not have any catalogue or guided tour. Instead of the traditional exhibition catalogue, it produced two publications; one mainly contained information on the exhibition's creation process, and the other included the discussions between twenty-six invited intellectuals on fifty words given by Lyotard.

As seen, even though the exhibition was initiated by someone's conceptual and philosophical investigation on the art of that time, its curatorial structure was based on an expansive and discursive format. A number of visitors might have experienced a lack of explanations and connections within the open and expansive way of presentation; however, this sense of openness shifted the visitors' focus into the space of discussion, allowing for diverse and in-depth readings. And here, it should be noted that the curator's authorial role allowed this reconsideration of and questions about the pre-given frames of exhibition making; specifically, its information delivery by an exhibition catalogue, an imposed route of viewing, a linear curator-artist-audience relationship and so forth. When *Les Immatériaux* opened in 1985, the transition of a curator from a museum conservator to exhibition author was vaguely acknowledged,⁷⁰ and Lyotard's exhibition in this sense drew a dramatic illustration of such a change.

It is in fact uncertain to what extent Catherine David was involved in this exhibition. Even so, as David indicated that she was enthusiastic about the idea of expansive and discursive exhibitions from the beginning of her career at the Centre Pompidou,⁷¹ it can be said that this period surely left a significant influence on her further practice. In this respect, another exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre* (1989) can be discussed in line with the curatorial practice of David, and also can reveal an authorial shift in curating in general.

⁶⁹ One of my curatorial projects, *Map the Korea* (2012) took a similar strategy. In the exhibition, there were multiple trajectories of viewing an exhibition. Viewers had to build their own way of seeing and understanding the exhibits, and this curating was further developed through *Penumbra* (2013) and *After the Events* (2013). See chapter 3.

⁷⁰ Although Harald Szeemann's *When Attitudes Become Form* (1969) and *Documenta V* (1972) expanded the practice of curating and brought it into broader territory, the notion of curator as an exhibition author was not widely acknowledged until the late 1980s. See Nathalie Heinich, 'Les Immatériaux Revisited: Innovation in Innovations'.

⁷¹ Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier (eds.), *Politics-Poetics: documenta X the Book*, p. 9.

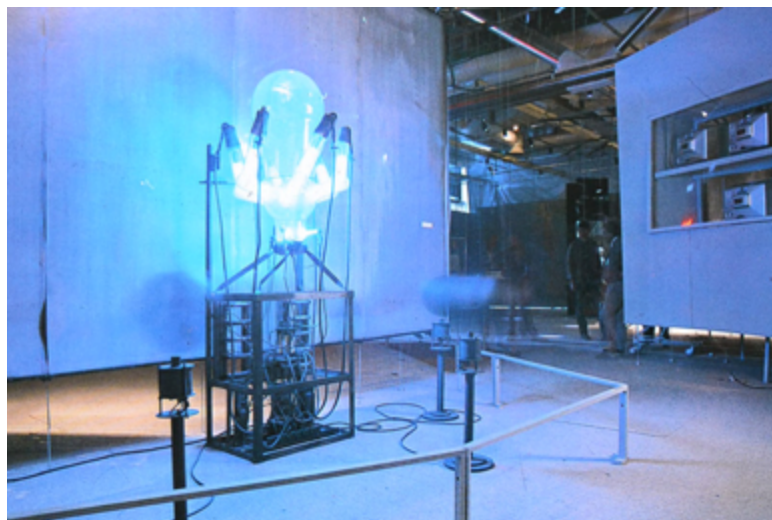


Figure 12: Exhibition view, *Les Immatériaux*, Centre Pompidou (1985)

Figure 13: Exhibition view, *Les Immatériaux*, Centre Pompidou (1985)

Figure 14: Richard Long, *Red Earth Circle*; Yuendumu community, *Yam Dreaming* (1989)
Installation view, *Magiciens de la Terre*, Grand Halle de la Villette, Paris (1989)

During the 1980s, many curators and institutions showed a certain tendency to curate with a more ethnographic approach to artworks in response to multiculturalism's call for the interrogation of differences. *Magiciens de la Terre* would be the most famous example from that period of time. Its curator Jean-Hubert Martin constructed the exhibition with the following sections: first, the artists from artistic centres representing a selection of art today, showing the mature works of the last twenty years mostly committed to the avant-garde; secondly, the Asian and African artists who live in the West, presenting the elements of their own cultural roots and their incorporation with the West; lastly, the artists who do not belong to these centres but to the peripheries, showing works of an archaic nature intended for ceremonies and rituals.⁷²

Although the curator maintained that what the exhibition aimed for was presenting a sense of aesthetic equality with these groups of artists, the actual exhibition was heavily criticised due to the problematic binarism of centre and periphery, and West and non-West. In particular, the exhibition was based on one-dimensional juxtaposition of West and non-West. For example, at the Grand Halle de la Villette, two works from the Western and non-Western traditions were juxtaposed: on the floor, there was a ceremonial piece titled *Yam Dreaming*, by the Aboriginal Australian Yueudumu community, and on the wall, there was a piece titled *Red Earth Circle* by the English artist Richard Long, which was made with clay from the River Avon, in England (Figure 14). Critics pointed out the position of Richard Long's work, high above the Australian aboriginal painting, as a metaphor for the curator's stance for the exhibition. They indicated the problem that this was based on the perspective of 'colonisers lording it over the colonised'.⁷³ Moreover, there was another criticism on the de-contextualisation of the works; it was said that the exhibition's 'lame curating'⁷⁴ of one-dimensional juxtaposition emptied out the real meanings of the works by erasing the historical and epistemological context, and concentrated only on the 'play of surfaces to dazzle the dominant eye'.⁷⁵

⁷² *Magiciens de la terre*, exhibition catalogue, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1989.

⁷³ Bruce Altshuler (ed.) *Biennials And Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History*, p. 283.

⁷⁴ Thomas McEvelly, 'The Global Issue', *Artforum*, March, 1990
<https://www.msu.edu/course/ha/491/mcevilleyartandotherness.pdf> (accessed 2 May 2015)

⁷⁵ Rasheed Araeen, 'Our Bauhaus, others' mudhouse', *Third Text*, Spring, 1989, pp. 3-14.

In the previous chapter, the ‘lame curating’ of early global art exhibitions was discussed in the context of contemporary Korean art.⁷⁶ Therefore, instead of focusing on the drawbacks of *Magiciens de la Terre*, I will turn to the exhibition’s practical influence on contemporary curating: the conceptualisation of an exhibition.

Based on the interview between the curator Jean-Hubert Martin and Benjamin H. D. Buchloh in 1989, it can be assumed that there was a very strong sense of independence and freedom in curating *Magiciens de la Terre*, particularly in conceptualising the exhibition. For instance, towards the criticism of deploying ethnocentric and hegemonic criteria in the exhibition, the curator argued that, “it could be worse to pretend that one could organise such an exhibition from an objective and un-aculturated perspective, a decentred point of view precisely. Therefore, I would select objects according to my own history and my own sensibility.”⁷⁷ Also, in the same interview, to the question about the cooperation with other specialists such as anthropologists and ethnographers for the exhibition, the curator stated that, “although I had benefitted from the advice of ethnographers and specialists of local and regional cultures, I should not forget that this project is an exhibition and if an ethnographer or other theorist suggests something insufficient in a visual-sensory manner, I could always refrain from that. It should be only the curator’s role to conceptualise the exhibition and choose works for that.”⁷⁸ Regardless of the reliability of Martin’s assertion, and whether his decision was right or not, the interview clearly showed the curator’s strong belief in curatorial independence and absolute power in conceptualising an exhibition.

What should be pointed out here is that although the exhibition is still considered problematic, its conceptualisation and the curator’s authorial role within it gave rise to the proliferation of curatorial practices. In particular, during the 1990s and 2000s, biennales and international art events were widely spread with the tendency of conceptualism, and these mega exhibitions of that time explicitly or implicitly responded to the exhibition subject of *Magiciens de la Terre*. In this regard, it can be argued that *Magiciens de la Terre* opened up two major trends in curating of the 1990s and 2000s: a new

⁷⁶ See chapter 1.

⁷⁷ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Jean-Hubert Martin, ‘The Whole Earth Show’ in *Biennials And Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History*, pp. 291 - 293. See original interview between Benjamin H. D. Buchloh and Jean-Hubert Martin, ‘The Whole Earth Show’, in *Art in America*, July, 1989.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

conceptualisation of the exhibition and its potential application in the global context. Similarly, Okwui Enwezor stated in the interview with Paul O'Neill in 2007 that as a very early attempt at a global exhibition, *Magiciens de la Terre* certainly opened up a 'new space' for contemporary curators not only with its subject, but also by introducing broader questions of 'conceptual investigation' to the practice of exhibition making in the global world.⁷⁹

2.3 Development of Discursive Curating

This conceptual investigation and authorial shift in curating led to diverse exhibition formats, and consequently, exerted a strong influence on the recent discursive turns in curating; mostly during the 1990s and 2000s the idea of discursive curating developed in earnest with ever-increasing international art events. To be specific, the consecutive *Documenta X* (1997) and *Documenta XI* (2002), curated by Catherine David and Okwui Enwezor respectively, were the most remarkable examples of this genre of exhibitions. Therefore, this part of the chapter will look into some notable exhibitions of that time, mostly David's. It should be noted, however, that it will focus more on drawing the exhibitions' curatorial frameworks rather than on revisiting gigantic discourses and numerous (non)-artworks that the exhibitions dealt with, so that it can keep the discussion on the curatorial shifts within the notion of discursiveness.

2.3.1 Documenta X

Catherine David left the Centre Pompidou in 1990, a year after her boss Jean-Hubert Martin curated the exhibition *Magiciens de la Terre*. Some years later, David became the first woman and French curator to direct Documenta. As one of the biggest art events in the world, Documenta has been a significant international exhibition and has demonstrated some tremendous paradigm shifts of curating. Harald Szeemann's *Documenta V* (1972) is often regarded as a symbolic example; it sought not only to introduce new arts but also to provide various concepts in order to broaden the visitors' relationship with the arts. With the inclusion of numerous non-art objects in the exhibition, it investigated the relationship between images and reality. The exhibits were not simply objects for appreciation; rather, they were containers and connotations of the more complex realities of that time. On that basis, curator and art historian Jan Van Der Marck made a comparison between Documenta and the Venice Biennale in his *Venice & Kassel: The Old and the New*

⁷⁹ Okwui Enwezor interviewed by Paul O'Neill, 'Curating Beyond the Canon', in *Curating Subjects* (ed.), Paul O'Neill (London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2011) pp. 109-122.

Politics in 1972. He illustrated Documenta as a 'meaningful vehicle' to understand art in an expansive way, and also as the 'first large-scale international exhibition' to replace the nineteenth-century's salon style exhibition of the Venice Biennale.⁸⁰

For *Documenta X*, David developed a curatorial strategy that attempted to 'link a multiplicity of contemporary arts from broad areas within the context of globalisation as if connecting numerous threads from different situations binding at the end of the 20th century'.⁸¹ This approach can be seen as a further development of the recognised character of Documenta, and also as a critical response to the previous edition, *Documenta IX* (1992) curated by Jan Hoet. Contrary to the one by David, the previous Documenta was intended to curate an exhibition with less reference to socio-political and cultural contexts, but with a more modernist sense of the representation of artworks. The curator himself described *Documenta IX* as an exhibition based 'solely on the artists and their works'. Instead of taking a broad exhibition frame operating with a thematic concept, which had been Documenta's salient characteristic since at least the fifth edition by Harald Szeemann, Hoet presented the exhibition as a medium to provide subjective experiences of beauty, and as a redemptive recuperation of modernist art out of complex reality.⁸²

Catherine David considered Hoet's *Documenta IX* as a mere representation of art, sterilised in the governed space of the white cube, so she introduced a very different mode of curating for *Documenta X* with the idea of 'looking back into the future' as a central motif. It rejected a rhetorical explanation of art and the Western notion of modernity, presenting instead a critical review on the past fifty years.⁸³ Also, she argued that, "it is time to understand that there is nothing outside of situated modernity, no simple contrasts between Centre and Periphery, Modern and Pre-Modern. We should imagine that there are many rooms in the house of modernity, and that modernity is a

⁸⁰ Jan Van Der Marck, 'Venice & Kassel: The Old and the New Politics' in *Biennials And Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History*, p. 173.

⁸¹ Robert Storr, 'Kassel Rock', *Artforum*, May 1997, pp. 77 -80/129-32.

⁸² Peter Schjeldahl, 'The Documenta of the Dog', *Art in America*, September 1992, pp. 67 – 77.

⁸³ Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier (eds.) *Politics-Poetics: documenta X the Book*, p. 10.



Figure 15: Peter Kogler, *documenta 10*, Documenta Halle (1997)

Figure 16: Vito Acconci, Celia Imrey, Dario Nunez, Sija Singer and Luis Vera, *Vito Acconci Studio*, Info-system/bookstore for Documenta 10 (1997)

Figure 17: Franz West, *Dokustuhl*; Heimo Zobernig, *Untitled (display for 100 Days-100 Guests)* (1997)

collection of many different processes of cultural construction”⁸⁴ (Figure 15, 16). As expected from David’s statement, *Documenta X* urged the need for an ‘expanded language’ of interpretation of the arts. One of the significant features of that intent could be seen from the way in which the exhibition took over urban spaces in Kassel. *Documenta X* showed a level of rejection of the ‘white cube’ as a primary ground for presenting arts or as a ‘space for revealing the hidden beauty’⁸⁵ of art as Hoet described. Rather, *Documenta X* considered several urban spaces in Kassel as exhibition venues, from stations and parks to local public offices, and attempted to present artworks and their narratives within more specific social contexts, in open spaces where public discussions and seminars could occur.⁸⁶

Furthermore, there was a special programme, titled *100 Days/100 Guests*; over the 100 days of the programme, David and other guests from different professional sectors brought out a series of night discussions, lectures, talks, and seminars (Figure 17). A literature scholar, Masao Miyoshi, has explained that the programme in *Radical Art at Documenta X* opened up a public conversation presenting diverse views on contemporary art beyond what had been already taken from Europe and North America⁸⁷, and this would be well proven from the list of 100 guests for the programme.⁸⁸ Not only to the public programmes, but also to the exhibition itself, David brought different voices from beyond the boundaries of Europe and North America. When considering the size of the exhibition, it would be difficult to go through the exhibits one by one, demonstrating how much the inclusion of different voices was actualised in the exhibition. Even so, it can be noted that at least one of *Documenta X*’s exceptional and pioneering achievements was in bringing

⁸⁴ Catherine David, ‘Das Marco Polo Syndrom’, *Undurchsichtige Räume* (published online 1995) http://universes-in-universe.de/doc/d_nbk2.htm, Quotation from http://universes-in-universe.de/doc/e_zitate.htm (accessed 5 March 2014)

⁸⁵ Peter Schjeldahl, ‘The Documenta of the Dog’, p. 72.

⁸⁶ This mode of curating with specific social contexts can also be seen from my projects *Richard Smith* (2013) and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* (2014). See chapter 4.

⁸⁷ Masao Miyoshi, ‘Radical Art at documenta X’, *New Left Review*, 228, March/April 1998, pp. 151 - 60. See also Masao Miyoshi, ‘A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism over the Decline of the National State’ in *Politics/Poetics: documenta X the Book*, pp. 182 - 202.

⁸⁸ The programme was started by Edward Said and continued with Okwui Enwezor, Carlos Basualdo, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Geeta Kapur, Masao Miyoshi, and many others. See the list of the speakers. http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/dx/english/frm_home.htm (accessed 3 April 2015)

Latin American contemporary art into the global discussion.⁸⁹ In this respect, David mentioned in the interview with Maribel Königer that, “Latin America is not the remotest world, but rather the edge of the West. Upon informing oneself, one will see that, like anywhere, there are interesting and important artists in Latin America. That is a question of attentiveness, intelligence, and curiosity.”⁹⁰ Also, it should be considered as a positive result that Latin American contemporary art has had much greater presence in the global art scene, with a series of discourses and many other following exhibitions since *Documenta X*.

As discussed, David’s practice was not merely about mounting an exhibition per se, rather it was more about opening up a public site for knowledge, question and discussion, and this mode of curating has left a huge impact on later contemporary curating. The immediate impact can be found in the *Documenta XI* (2002) curated by Okwui Enwezor, the first non-white and non-European director of Documenta. He has stated that there were certain parallels between his and David’s practice.⁹¹ The Nigerian-American director incorporated the multiple and discursive platforms that David had built on at her *Documenta X*. To be specific, instead of curating solely an exhibition of artworks, Enwezor set up five dispersing platforms expanding the spatial and temporal spectra of conventional exhibitions, and each platform dealt with the issues around the globalising art world, as David had done in the previous edition. Platform 1 was built in Vienna and Berlin as two parts on the subject of democracy, Platform 2 in New Delhi dealt with the subjects of justice and reconciliation, Platform 3 in St. Lucia was a gathering of fifteen writers who worked on the subject of creolisation, and Platform 4 in Lagos presented stories of urban Africa. Finally, Platform 5 in Kassel explored discussions of the other four Platforms, primarily via documentary modes of representation.⁹²

⁸⁹ Catherine David and Jean-François Chevrier (eds.), *Politics/Poetics: documenta X the Book*, p. 8.

⁹⁰ Catherine David interviewed by Maribel Königer in Kurzer Auszug, Kunstforum, 1994, http://universes-in-universe.de/doc/d_koen.htm, Quotation from http://universes-in-universe.de/doc/e_zitate.htm (accessed 5 March 2014)

⁹¹ Okwui Enwezor interviewed by Paul O’Neill, ‘Curating Beyond Canon’, pp. 109-122.

⁹² Bruce Altshuler (ed.), *Biennials And Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History*, p. 373. See also Okwui Enwezor (ed.), *Documenta 11_Platform 5: Exhibition: Catalogue* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2002)



Figure 18: Pascale Marthine Tayou, *Game Station* (2002)

Figure 19: Meschac Gaba, *Museum of Contemporary African Art: Library* (2001-2002)

Figure 20: Raqs Media Collective, *28°28' N / 77°15' E* 2001-2002, An Installation on the Coordinates of Everyday Life in Delhi (2001-2002)

In Kassel, different discourses and visuals were presented through the four large main exhibition sites with a substantial number of artists and artist collectives from Latin America, Africa, the Middle East and Asia. In the exhibition, there was a great deal of film and video work. For example, Pascale Marthine Tayou's installation work, *Game Station* presented numerous images of streets, shops, houses, and other places in Yaounde, Cameroon through an array of television sets (Figure 18), and Meschac Gaba's *Museum of Contemporary African Art: Library* showcased a collection of the artist's books, videos, and digital images (Figure 19). Also, Raqs Media Collective's *Co-ordinates 28.8N 77.15E* was an installation work that virtually connected the city of Delhi to the abstractions of other spaces and times by using video screens, sound, and other printed materials (Figure 20). All these works were very informative, and it was estimated that it would take up to six hundred hours to see all of the works⁹³ at *Documenta XI*, which clearly indicated that the exhibition never meant to reach its conclusion. In this *Documenta*, curating was not a suggestion of terminus,⁹⁴ rather it was a suggestion of diverse voices of art, masses of informative materials related to them, and different paths of acknowledging them for the visitors. Therefore, *Documenta XI* should not be conceived as a finished representation, but as a 'constellation'⁹⁵ of different representations of the issues and debates spelt out from the different Platforms in five locations in Europe, Asia, the Americas, and Africa.

2.3.2 Contemporary Arab Representations

After *Documenta X*, Catherine David further developed the discursive mode of curating through her long-term project *Contemporary Arab Representations*. An advance from her earlier project *Documenta X* with an interest in Latin American contemporary art, the new project explored a similar logic of geopolitical curating, but this time with Arab or Middle Eastern artists. However, the project title, *Contemporary Arab Representations* immediately raised concerns over the practice of geopolitically or ethnically oriented curating. For example, a Beirut-based curator Christine Tohme expressed her scepticism of the idea of Arab representation. Tohme stated that, "the idea of representation would not separate art practice from politics or the market. It often serves as an identity to create

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box', pp. 42-55. See also Johanne Lamoureux, 'The Politics of Representation and the Representation of Politics', *Art Journal*, Vol. 64, no. 1, Spring, 2005, pp. 64-73.

⁹⁵ The notion of constellation can be closely related to the recent discursive turns in curating. The chapter explores the notion along with the paracuratorial aspect of the discursive turns in the later part.

a framework in order to create a seductive image”.⁹⁶ Similarly, a writer and curator working on Lebanese film, Rasha Salti argued that, “the title seems too generic, too vague. It begs the question, what of Arab representations?”⁹⁷ To these questions, David explained that she chose the term ‘representation’ because it could signify ‘the complex dimensions of aesthetics in relation to social and political situations.’⁹⁸ She further argued in a group discussion, *Curating Beirut: A Conversation on the Politics of Representation* that “it is really important to consider Arab culture as a civilisational fact, one that is conflictive and irreducible to a single religion or nationality. The title could be more adequate but it has to have some terms that designate a particular area, because it enables us to point to the political, social and aesthetic currency of a specific region.”⁹⁹

As David asserted, rather than taking an enunciated mode of representation, the project itself attempted to put the term Arab into the heterogeneous site of complex dimensions. And in sharing the framework of her earlier project, David proposed *Contemporary Arab Representations* as a platform for public discussions. There were a number of seminars, performances, publications, and presentations by theorists and practitioners from different disciplines of visual arts, architecture, literature, and film: a series of public seminars held at the International University of Seville in 2001 marked the start of the project. At the first seminar in October 2001, the socio-political situation in the Middle East was discussed, with a focus on the city of Beirut and Lebanon, and this led to the first exhibition, *Beirut/Lebanon* (2002). After the launch, every exhibition of *Contemporary Arab Representations* started with seminars at the International University of Seville, exploring different historic, political, social and cultural discourses of the region.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁶ Sandra Dagher, Catherine David, Rasha Salti, Christine Tohme and T. J. Demos, ‘A Conversation on the Politics of Representation’, *Art Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 2, Summer, 2007, p. 110.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Catherine David (ed.), *Tamass I: Contemporary Arab Representations* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies and Witte de With, 2004) p. 10.

⁹⁹ My curatorial projects *Map the Korea* (2012) and *Penumbra: an 8 day Project with 8 artists* (2013) took a similar strategy of bringing specific terms and grounds that could designate particular questions and struggles in presenting Korean art. See chapter 3. See also Sandra Dagher, Catherine David, Rasha Salti, Christine Tohme and T. J. Demos, ‘A Conversation on the Politics of Representation’, p. 112.

¹⁰⁰ The first seminar was called *Contemporary Arab Representations: Seminar: Middle East*, which was held on 22-26 October 2001 at UNIA in Seville. Also, four other subsequent seminars happened in the same location. See UNIA archive page. http://app.unia.es/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=513 (accessed 2 May 2015)



Figure 21: Exhibition view, *Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut / Lebanon*, Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona (2002)

Figure 22: Project view, *Contemporary Arab Representations*, 50th Venice Biennale (2003)

Figure 23: Salam Pax, video diaries in the left screening booth; Talal Refit, *Democracy* (2005) Exhibition view, *The Iraqi Equation*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2005)

The physical exhibitions of *Contemporary Arab Representations* can be divided into three major parts: *Beirut/Lebanon* (2002), *Cairo/Egypt* (2003) and *The Iraqi Equation* (2005 - 2007). The first two parts, *Beirut/Lebanon* (2002) and *Cairo/Egypt* (2003) were focused on the representation of the cities with the inclusion of not only artistic or aesthetic practices but also political and historical pieces.¹⁰¹ For that inclusion, David took ‘documentary’ and ‘archive’ as a central medium to illustrate the socio-political and cultural realities of the cities. For example, the presentation of *Beirut/Lebanon* at Fundació Antoni Tàpies in 2002 - similar to the former exhibitions at the BildMuseet in Umeå and the Witte de With in Rotterdam – comprised twenty-two projects (Figure 21). Although different artists and intellectuals, working in different fields, developed each project, most works were based on the documentary forms of photos/films and visual/text archives. The exhibition also included a special media centre, where visitors could watch live broadcasts from a total of seventeen TV channels from the Arab world.¹⁰²

This use of documentary and informative resources progressed even further in *Contemporary Arab Representations* at the 50th Venice Biennale in 2003. It was a smaller project and manifestation of *Contemporary Arab Representations* in the Biennale context. For this temporary presentation, some selected contents from *Beirut/Lebanon* (2002) and *Cairo/Egypt* (2003) were unpacked, and these almost looked like an information kiosk or temporary library, with a substantial volume of textual and visual documents. This included works by The Atlas Group: Walid Raad, Taysir Batniji, Tony Chakar, Bilal Khbeiz, Randa Shaath, and Paola Yacoub and Michel Lasserre; however, the contributed pieces were more like ‘works in progress’ and ‘documentation’ of their research rather than finished art pieces. It was neither a re-staging of ‘previous moments’ of *Contemporary Arab Representations*, nor was it an exhibition.¹⁰³ Rather, it was more like a project of projects, which almost transformed the viewers into readers with extensive use of informative sources (Figure 22).

¹⁰¹ Catherine David (ed.), *Tamáss: Contemporary Arab Representations: Cairo 2* (Barcelona/Rotterdam: Fundació Antoni Tàpies/Witte de With, 2003) p. 36.

¹⁰² See ‘Contemporary Arab Representations: Beirut / Lebanon’, Fundació Antoni Tàpies programme page, <http://www.fundaciotapies.org/site/spip.php?rubrique493> (accessed 2 May 2015)

¹⁰³ Catherine David, ‘Contemporary Arab Representations, Arsenale’ in Press Information, La Biennale di Venezia, 50th International Art Exhibition in 2003, <http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien50/arab/e-press.htm> (accessed 3 April 2014)

The Iraqi Equation, the final stage of *Contemporary Arab Representations*, which took place between 2005 and 2007,¹⁰⁴ also focused on presenting a huge volume of photographs, videos, and television recordings from several Iraqi networks, questioning the stereotypical and dramatic images of the country and war. In particular, one of the most famous Iraqi bloggers, Salam Pax, presented his blog postings on Iraqi politics and society in a polemic and often humorous way, with the use of photos, texts, video diaries, and documents of conversation with other bloggers as main sources; for example, he described how the images of Iraq, especially in relation to the war, were filtered and presented through the mass media (Figure 23).

Additionally, there was a series of films by Iraqis who had left the country in the recent past, for example, Sinan Antoon, Tariq Hashim, Maysoon Pachachi, and Baz Shamoun. For instance, Maysoon Pachachi's work *Return to the Land of Wonders* (2004) told a story about herself and her father, a veteran Iraqi politician, Adnan. The film described their lives in Iraq after their return to the country for the first time since the late 1970s. The film often revealed a picture of the US military's censorship, illustrating how one's private life in the country was controlled and constrained by violence and the wishes of the US.¹⁰⁵ *The Iraqi Equation* also included a series of slideshows; one slideshow was from the archive of the Beirut-based Arab Image Foundation,¹⁰⁶ consisting of more than three hundred portraits of Iraqis and architectural images archived from the 1930s to 1970s, and also, two other slideshows of photographs by Latif Al-Ani that presented the modern Baghdad with images of urban and rural landscapes.

This extensive use of documentary and archive works in *Contemporary Arab Representations* through *Beirut/Lebanon* (2002), *Cairo/Egypt* (2003) and *The Iraqi Equation* (2005 – 2007) stemmed from the curator's recognition that these images could reveal the real contexts of the region. More specifically, these digital and web images were created mostly out of a pressing necessity, but by individuals who wanted to document and share what was actually happening in the specific area. Therefore, the

¹⁰⁴ This final stage of the project toured three venues in Europe between late 2005 and early 2007: KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin, 18/12/05–26/02/06; Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 28/04–25/06/06; BildMuseum, Umeå, 5/11/06–21/01/07.

¹⁰⁵ Abdellah Karroum, 'Contemporary Arabic Representations, Act III - The Iraqi Equation', *L'APPARTEMENT 22* (published online 6 June 2006) <http://www.appartement22.com/spip.php?article13> (accessed 2 May 2015)

¹⁰⁶ A group primarily comprised of Lebanese artists including Akram Zaatari and Walid Raad set up the organisation in the 1990s.

images entailed different personal views on the region, which was in a constant state of charge and insecurity, beyond what the mass media had provided. These digital images were also the most effective and quickest way to raise the consciousness of people both in and outside the situation, owing to their easily shareable format. In this sense, David's project gave nuanced but highly specified images of the contemporary Arab world, demonstrating the region's social, political and cultural narratives that were conflictive and irreducible to a single national or cultural frame. Consequently, this enabled various layers of perception and a better understanding of contemporary Arab art, as well as the related socio-political situations in the region.

2.3.3 This is not a Taiwan Pavilion

Two consecutive Documenta exhibitions led by Catherine David and Okwui Enwezor, and David's project *Contemporary Arab Representations*, aimed at ending the dysfunction of conventional exhibition frames, challenging the representative mode of curating.

Furthermore, these exhibitions brought the idea of discursive curating together with greater consideration of the spaces of spectatorship. For instance, Enwezor stated that spectatorship is central and fundamental to all forms of exhibitions, and curating practice should take a 'democratic' and 'open system' because spectatorship can only function productively within that system.¹⁰⁷ In a similar sense, David's practices also showed explicit elements of public conversation and open discussion, which were often taken as the main mechanism for her to open up new vocabularies of contemporary art. This idea of a democratic and open system to stimulate a public discussion would be an essential aspect of the recent discursive turn in contemporary curating.

As an example, the Taiwan Pavilion, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion* curated by Esther Lu at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 developed the idea of an open status exhibition to arouse public discussion. In November 2012, the Taipei Fine Arts Museum announced Esther Lu as a curator and Chia-Wei Hsu, Bernd Behr, and Kateřina Šedá as featured artists for the Taiwanese National Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale. After the announcement, controversies broke out in the Taiwanese art scene because it was the first time that the Taiwan Pavilion had shown works by non-Taiwanese nationals. Apart from one Taiwanese artist, Chia-Wei Hsu, two others were to be foreigners: Taiwanese-German artist Bernd Behr, and Czech artist Kateřina Šedá. And also, along with the list of artists,

¹⁰⁷ Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box', pp. 42-55

there was the paradoxical theme of the exhibition: the Taiwan Pavilion versus *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*.

The curator illustrated this paradoxical theme that “artistic narratives of the exhibition will explore and engage with the notion of national pavilion not as an exhibition *per se*, but as a conceptual and temporal axis for thinking about the formation of cultural/national subjectivity.”¹⁰⁸ This statement surely indicated the curator’s denial of the image of contemporary Taiwanese art at the time. In fact, art exhibitions in Taiwan during the last few decades have not presented diverse narratives. For instance, a competition-based biennial exhibition, *Contemporary Art Trends* from 1984 to 1990, was dedicated to the works influenced by American Abstract Expressionism, and another major art exhibition, *Taipei Biennale*, also presented a very homogeneous image of Taiwanese art. Moreover, the Taiwan Pavilion in Venice during the 1990s was no more than ‘an identity-defining machine’¹⁰⁹ with self-orientalising representations of Taiwanese art. In response to this, and as a part of the non-culture-specific approach to contemporary art, which flourished after the mid-2000s in Taiwan,¹¹⁰ the Taiwan Pavilion, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion* was organised around the following questions: how can an international exhibition be taken as a critical space? What should a national exhibition present in this global art scene? And how can the Taiwan Pavilion itself answer these questions?

Yet again, the paradoxical theme ‘This is not a Taiwan Pavilion’ tellingly explored these questions. Lu explained the curatorial strategy that the ambiguous and rather paradoxical setting of the pavilion was to resonate not only with art, but also with Taiwan’s present condition within global society.¹¹¹ As she demonstrated, the contradiction of the Taiwan Pavilion corresponded to the country’s international and diplomatic situation. From 2003, the Taiwan pavilion was no longer listed among the official national pavilions of the Venice Biennale. Taiwan, officially known as the Republic of China, lost its national

¹⁰⁸ Esther Lu, ‘*This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*’, *Artforum News* (webpage published 26 March 2013) <http://artforum.com/news/id=39998> (accessed 2 May 2015)

¹⁰⁹ Carol Duncan, ‘Art Museums and the Ritual of Citizenship’, in *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display* (eds.), Ivan Karp and Steven Lavine (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991) pp. 88-103.

¹¹⁰ Chu-Chiun Wei, ‘From National Art to Critical Globalism’, in *Third Text*, Vol. 27, Issue 4, 2013, pp. 470-484.

¹¹¹ Esther Lu (ed.), *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*, exhibition catalogue, The Taipei Fine Arts Museum, 2013, p. 17. See also Esther Lu, ‘The Venice Questionnaire’, in *ArtReview* (webpage) http://artreview.com/previews/10_venice_esther_lu/ (accessed 10 April 2014)

status in 1979 when the US switched its diplomatic recognition to the People's Republic of China. Since then, Taiwan has been isolated internationally, and even now, it is not recognised as an independent nation by most countries in the world. At the same time, China has pushed the One-China policy since the 1970s, which has led to a level of tension between China and Taiwan for a long time. Indeed, in 1999 there was a protest from the Chinese government against Taiwan's participation in the national pavilions of Venice Biennale. Consequently, the Venice Biennale omitted Taiwan Pavilion from the listed official national pavilions, and since then, Taiwan's participation in Venice has been a limited part of the collateral events.

Based on this political and historical shift, it can be seen that the paradox was borrowed as a metaphor to depict the condition of the Taiwan Pavilion, as well as to create a 'discursive axis' for the artists to work on imaginatively and act on in real life. With this axis, the exhibition cancelled boundaries in order to explore the questions, and the artists presented their satellite projects generating an alternative notion of space, time and subjectivity.

For example, Kateřina Šedá's performance, *This is not a Czech Pavilion* (Figure 24) questioned the system of contemporary art and of power relations generated by capitalism and global networks. The performance was developed with BATEŽO MIKILU, a group of six high school students who had asked Šedá to change their own village of Zastávka, an almost forgotten industrial town without any social and political function in the Czech Republic. Šedá was inspired by the similar problems shared by these two places, Taiwan and Zastávka, and how they have been simply washed away within global relations. Šedá and BATEŽO MIKILU attempted to raise an awareness of the situation by questioning the way in which the audience saw the Venice Biennale, Taiwan, the Czech Republic and Zastávka. During the biennale period, the performers walked through every national pavilion with blue shoe covers, asking people for the directions to the Taiwan Pavilion, and then unleashing different conversations between them.¹¹² Here, the performers played the role of strangers and became considerable images themselves, through which the audience could think and imagine the spaces hidden in the global structures. With the satellite projects, the Taiwan Pavilion, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion* aimed at drawing an imaginary space that explored how art would be able to reveal a discursive space where

¹¹² See Esther Lu (ed.), *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*, pp. 34-41.

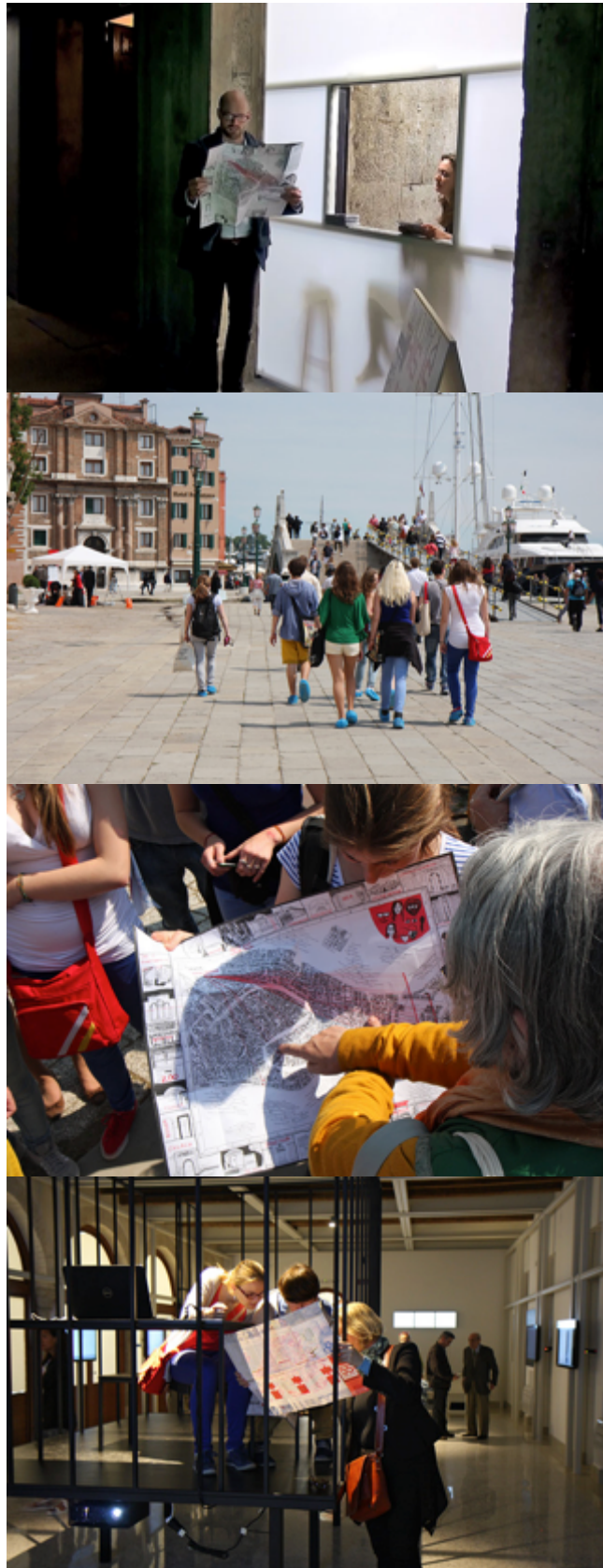


Figure 24: Kateřina Šedá + BATEŽO MIKILU, *This is not a Czech Pavilion* (2013)
 Taiwan Pavilion, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*, 55th Venice Biennale (2013)

people could debate with each other. In such a process, the exhibition discussed the existing hierarchical structure of the biennale, and then expanded and redirected the project into the broad discussion grounds of the cultural, political and economic hegemony of globalisation.

2.3.4 Chimurenga Library

The exhibition *The Chimurenga Library* held at The Showroom, London in 2015 can also be discussed as a recent example of a discursive curatorial attempt at testing multidimensional geographical presentation within a global setting. As previously discussed, *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion* presented the political and cultural debate in and around Taiwan by rethinking the idea of curating a national pavilion within the context of the most international art event, the Venice Biennale. And the national pavilion, which was paradoxically against the idea of representing a nation, linked itself with other geographies and contexts to challenge the limited image of Taiwan. Similarly, *The Chimurenga Library* attempted to broaden the notion of African art and culture by engaging with other geographies, cultures and histories, but more actively and directly than *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*, whose engagement was seen as metaphorical.

The exhibition *The Chimurenga Library*, co-curated by Chimurenga,¹¹³ the Otolith Collective and the Showroom, presented diverse African arts and culture, and connected them with our collective consciousness of realities and histories. For that attempt, Chimurenga transformed the exhibition space into an open platform for generating multiple ideas and discussions about Africa. The exhibition consisted of a series of discursive activities and events, which would be explained through two major activities of Chimurenga; the online radio station, the Pan African Space Station (PASS) and their long-term publication project, the Chronic. For the first five days of the exhibition, Chimurenga, in partnership with the Showroom, the Otolith Collective, Sorryyoufeeluncomfortable, and Pass Me the Microphone, hosted a live broadcasting programme of PASS to present African art and culture from many different perspectives. For the live programmes, a range of UK based writers, journalists, musicians, film-makers, choreographers, historians, visual artists and curators were invited as guest interviewees

¹¹³ Chimurenga is the innovative Cape Town based collective found by Ntone Edjabe in 2002. See <http://www.chimurenga.co.za> (10 June 2016)

and presenters.¹¹⁴ And their interviews, talks, music and other related events, broadcast through PASS, brought a wide range of discussions and views on Africa, exploring expansive studies and awareness beyond the geographical boundaries of Africa and the UK.

This periodic radio station played a central role in forming the whole exhibition content. Live radio was recorded and replayed during the exhibition as if it was a living archive, and the contents were visualised and further expanded throughout the two floors of The Showroom. Along with PASS, other people, ideas, discussions, research, and art were brought into the exhibition space. And they were mingled with the content of PASS and mapped by coloured tapes, making many possible routes for reading it. (Figure 25) Also, on the taped routes Chimurenga featured other on/offline projects, for example, the Chronic, a quarterly gazette that centres on the culture, art and politics of Africa. Throughout the exhibition space, the Chronic's visually striking drawings and photographs could be seen, as well as bold writings from a range of contributors, including Binyavanga Wainaina, Paula Akugizibwe, Lesego Ramolokeng, Kodwo Eshun and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.¹¹⁵ (Figure 26)

Both projects, PASS and the Chronic, centred in the exhibition, could easily transcend the boundaries of existing exhibition space and push the limitations of pre-conceived images of African art. Due to the nature of the projects, it was possible for the exhibition to deal with a massively wide range of subjects, not only African art but also broad socio-political situations related to African art. In particular, the exhibition extensively dealt with the subject of the Black diaspora in the UK, through a series of discussions on contemporary societies, histories, and politics. The works of George Hallett, who originally came from Cape Town but lived both in London and Amsterdam, were widely explored. Hallett often used the record sleeve and book jacket as a platform for illustrating the reality of black artists during the apartheid era. (Figure 27) In his photography work, he documented many

¹¹⁴ Guest presenters and interviewees include: Kinsi Abdullah (Numbi Arts), Larry Achiampong, Teju Adeleye, Agency for Agency (Barby Asante and Teresa Cisneros), Junior Boakye-Yiadom, Paul Bradshaw, Phoebe Boswell, James Currey, Dego (2000 Black), Christine Eyene, Bryan Gee, Henriette Gunkel, Hassan Hajjaj, Ayesha Hameed, Shabaka Hutchings, Anthony Joseph, Yoel Keenan, Kevin LeGendre, Jenny Mbaye, Michael McMillan, Christian Nyampeta, Zak Ove, Hardeep Pandhal, Pinise Saul, George Shire, Dele Sosimi, Tom Skinner, Marsha Smith, Matthew Temple, Kemang Wa Lehulere, Esa Williams and Rehana Zaman. See <http://www.theshowroom.org/projects/the-chimurenga-library> (10 June 2016)

¹¹⁵ See <http://chimurengachronic.co.za> (10 June 2016)

South African artists, in particular jazz musicians in exile such as Chris McGregor, Johnny Dyani, and many others in the *Brotherhood of Breath*, the South African jazz that had a huge influence on the European jazz scene. By presenting Hallett's works, the exhibition told a real story of how these diaspora artists travelled and continued their work in Europe, particularly in Britain, and it indicated how these artists could be discussed in the context of a global society.

As seen, the exhibition *Chimurenga Library* was not just showcasing the works and their narratives but also contextualising them within broad histories and societies. In presenting very particular narratives of the black diaspora, the exhibition linked the two different geographies of South Africa and Europe. London was portrayed in the exhibition as an important place which shared historical commonalities and legacies of the black diaspora. Here, the live programmes of PASS played a crucial part in linking the two geographies and Hallett's works were often presented as testament that many South African artists made their way to the city and made impacts on its culture in many ways. For instance, through the PASS, London based curator and historian Christine Eyene, who specialised in African diaspora art, presented a history of how African diaspora artists became a part of European culture by examining some cases of South African Artists in Britain. Also, many other London based artists, musicians and writers including Larry Achiampong, Henriette Gunkel, Shabaka Hutchings and George Shire participated in the PASS as presenters talking about their practice/research and its relation to Black Diaspora.¹¹⁶ These participants acted as transnational living archives and legacies that connected the cultures of Africa and Europe, and in particular, Cape Town and London.

It can be said that *The Chimurenga Library* attempted to build a discursive platform in London for suggesting many possible ways of understanding African art instead of defining what African art is or how it should be framed. The curation of the exhibition showed a real commitment to raising important questions regarding African art and its presentation in a global context. It was not limited by a singular location or geography. Rather, it kept its curatorial framework flexible and offered a way to shift fixed ideas about Africa, where our knowledge of the region came from, and how it can be expanded with real narratives and experience. As explored, each programme of the exhibition presented existing works and discussions, whilst at the same time building a collaborative

¹¹⁶ For more details on the events by Chimurenga collaborators, see <http://www.theshowroom.org/events/pan-african-space-station-pass> (10 June 2016)



Figure 25: Exhibition view, *The Chimurenga Library*, The Showroom, London (2015)

Figure 26: Text/Images from *The Chronic* in *The Chimurenga Library*, The Showroom, London (2015)

Figure 27: George Hallett photographs in *The Chimurenga Library*, The Showroom, London (2015)

platform to expand the vocabulary of African art. It was formed with a process of interaction and activation through a complex network, and the subversion of current representations of African art. Through this discursive and collaborative framework, the exhibition could reveal the real and expanded narratives of African art, demonstrating that we need a much-widened curatorial platform for presenting an expansive vision of realities and imaginaries.

2.4 Paracuratorial Practice

It has been shown that the authorial shift in curating has opened a new page of discursive curating with more diverse formats of exhibitions over the past few decades. Curating has become a multifaceted activity incorporating the roles of producer, mediator, interface and neo-critic.¹¹⁷ In this ever-expanding curatorial paradigm, an exhibition today is a site of creation and discussion that continuously offers forms of resistance to its conventional function as a showroom. For example, the curatorial projects by Catherine David tackled the single enunciated mode of curating. They engaged with discursive means of presentation and contextualisation of artworks cooperating with dematerialised mediums, such as talks, lectures, symposiums, seminars, and discussions. A cultural theorist, Irit Rogoff explained this element of conversation, especially with the example of David's project *Contemporary Arab Representations*, as the most significant shift in contemporary curating,¹¹⁸ and, as noted earlier, the artist and curator, Mick Wilson used the term 'discursive turn' to explain the tendency, illustrating its mode of curating as the 'advocacy of exchange'.¹¹⁹

As explored, so-called discursive curating mostly results from the creation of open-ended discussions and of alternative curatorial frameworks, and in the process it frequently reconceptualises the conventional mode of curating as a public debate or experimental laboratory. This curatorial *modus operandi* has been adopted and further developed by many contemporary curators since 1990s, e.g., Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Hou

¹¹⁷ Saskia Bos, 'Towards a Scenario: Debate with Liam Gillick', in *Modernity Today: Contributions to a topical artistic discourse, De Appel Reader No. 1* (Amsterdam: de Appel, 2004) p. 74.

¹¹⁸ Irit Rogoff, 'Turning', in *Curating and the Educational Turn* (eds.), Paul O'Neill and Mick Wilson (London/Amsterdam: Open Editions/de Appel, 2010) pp. 33-46.

¹¹⁹ Mick Wilson, 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', p. 209.

Hanru, and so forth.¹²⁰ Moreover, a number of art institutions, including the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in Gateshead, the Kunstverein Munich, and the Palais de Tokyo in Paris have been sharing similar metaphors of ‘laboratory’, ‘open-platform’ and ‘factory’ with the logic of discursive exhibition.

Other enquiries, however, follow from this shift: whether this tendency of discursive curating actually pushes the limit of conventional exhibition and enriches contemporary art; and how we can evaluate this kind of discursive curating. To answer the questions, a heated discussion between two international curators Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind can be brought in. In the discussion, they expressed very different perspectives towards the current tendency of discursive curating, particularly in terms of the quality. To be specific, Hoffmann expressed his concern over the tendency, and criticised that the term curating was being unconsciously adopted and used within it. He maintained that:

Curating is about formulating a certain theory or argument, based upon which one makes a selection of artworks or other objects with the aim of creating an exhibition. Too many curators seem to think exhibition making is a thing of the past, and today it has to be all about what I call the ‘paracuratorial’: lectures, screenings, exhibitions without art, working with artists on projects without ever producing anything that could be exhibited.¹²¹

Hoffmann indicates the tendency of discursive curating as a quasi-curating that starts something paracuratorial, but never perfects it since it does not have any definitive point of view, and therefore, this curating hardly invites viewers into serious analysis and critique, but only gives a provisional site of talking for its own sake.

In contrast, Maria Lind illustrates that discursive curating can go further beyond the narrow sense of ‘exhibition business’¹²² that is based on the act of organising a commission, programming a collateral event, working with extant artworks, hanging or placing them together within an exhibition, et cetera. This is because so-called discursive curating implies different forms of exhibitions and curating methodologies that take art as its starting point and present it in relation to specific contexts, times and questions.

¹²⁰ See Paul O’Neil, ‘Curating as a Medium of Artistic Practice: The Convergence of Art and Cultural Practice since the 1990s, in *The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Cultures* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012) pp. 87 – 129.

¹²¹ Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, ‘To Show Or Not to Show’, *Mousse Magazine* (webpage) <http://moussemagazine.it/articolo.mm?id=759> (accessed 10 April 2014)

¹²² Jens Hoffmann and Maria Lind, ‘To Show Or Not to Show’.

Therefore, it can have a qualitative difference from conventional museum exhibitions, and also, it can challenge the status quo by carrying a potential for radical change. She states that:

Exhibition making works best as a somewhat organic. [...] To stay with one format would be like one form of packaging for everything. It is important to be able to, when appropriate, go beyond the pure facilitation and caressing of art. Being subservient can be good, even useful, but sometimes we also need to take up the challenge of art and answer back, which for me means taking art and artists super seriously because a daunting majority of exhibitions today seems to be made by rote, with very little care or precision.¹²³

As seen, the curators show distinct differences in their opinions on the value of discursive curating. However, its quality seems to be hardly examined since the value of discursive curating itself can be ambivalent, as Wilson argued in his *Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns*. For example, towards the exhibition *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion*, two very different viewpoints can be depicted. One might applaud the exhibition for questioning the notion of the national exhibition in an international biennale, and for resonating with Taiwan's present status in international relations. Another might criticise the exhibition for being disturbingly ambiguous, and for unconstructively challenging the subjectivity of Taiwanese art by following an international trend of discursive curating. And this double-sided evaluation could be applied to almost every discursive exhibition.

It seems that the value of discursive curating is approved when it creates communication, and it is often considered as opposed to the logic of representation. In this sense, as Lind argued, discursive curating resonates with 'a non-instrumental, un-coerced, and non-marketised practice, presenting diverse narratives, which is un-tethered from transactional goal-oriented curating.'¹²⁴ However, its discursiveness is only valuable when it is open and in operation. When it is closed, it is no more than a medium of brokering and a connection to nothing. Here, discursive curating can be target-less by simply situating imagined discussion into the abstract group of participant-audience. Even if it was based on the premise of democratic methods, the actual practice might exclude the audience, and operate within a closed group. As a result, as Hoffmann maintained, the exhibition remains only in a passive framework of openness without any critical value.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

The aspect of *paracuratorial*,¹²⁵ rooted in discursive curating, seems to be the main debating point since this aspect can give rise to divided opinions; it can be seen as a positive turning of curating into a multi-layered and expanded field, but at the same time, it can be regarded as a tool for labelling anything as curatorial, justifying a lack of relevant curatorial voice. And here, instead of choosing one side and supporting it, I would like to question how this paracuratorial aspect of contemporary curating can be welcomed itself and taken further as a potential terrain that operates within the expansive curatorial paradigm. With a similar intent, Paul O'Neill has argued that the paracuratorial aspect has to be conceived as a 'constellation' that contemporary curating should aim to build up.¹²⁶ He shared Theodor Adorno's notion of constellation here:

As a constellation, theoretical thought circles the concept it would like to unseal, hoping that it will fly open like the lock of well-guarded safe-deposit box: in response, not to a single key or a single number, but to a combination or numbers.¹²⁷

He stated that, "the paracuratorial as a constellation can present incommensurable social subjects, ideas, and complex relations between them. And also, it can demonstrate the structural faults and falsities of the inherent notion of the hermetic exhibition as primary curatorial work."¹²⁸ His argument on the notion of constellation generally supports the paracuratorial aspect by considering it as an ever-shifting and dynamic cluster of different elements, which always resists a single composition, and retains a tension between different ideas and boundaries. However, it should be noted that his argument is not for fetishising an ambiguity of the paracuratorial. Its intention is rather to urge the need for curating to go beyond the manifested and instrumental means of curating. Furthermore, it should not be ignored that the notion of constellation demands a strong sense of 'specificity'. Paracuratorial activity developed with specific subjects and plans can only build up a constellation of discussions. In short, desirable discursive exhibitions should

¹²⁵ Paul O'Neill illustrates the paracuratorial as a tendency of recent curating, which is operating away from, alongside, or supplementary to the main curatorial work of exhibition making. See Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', *The Exhibitionist*, Vol. 6, June 2012, pp. 55-61.

¹²⁶ He states that the paracuratorial can operate as a potential site that both operates within the curatorial paradigm and retains a destabilizing relationship with it via (para-)texts, sites, works, and institutes. See Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', pp. 55-61.

¹²⁷ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* (New York & London: Continuum, 2007) p. 163.

¹²⁸ Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Constellation and the Paracuratorial Paradox', pp. 55-61.

have a definite of specificity, but not a definitive point of view, and this specificity can be the answer for all the sceptical opinions about discursive curating and its paracuratorial aspects.

2.5 Conclusion

It has been seen in the previous chapter that many curating practices today are initiated from the already sanctioned art market and restricted to object-oriented exhibitions, revealing a problematic presentation of contemporary art. In response to that, many curators have shown a series of discursive exhibitions, which problematise the recently manifested logic of representative and instrumental curating. This chapter explored a number of symbolic and historical exhibitions in order to respond to the question of *how* the idea of discursive curating has influenced contemporary curating.

This so-called discursive turn in curating surely opened up a new chapter in its practice by operating with more diverse narratives and exhibition formats. But at the same time, it raised questions about how the quality of discursive curating can be examined, and what discursiveness actually means to contemporary curating. Considering these enquiries, paracuratorial could be a useful term to describe the recent turns in curating, as well as its ambivalent values. In the foregoing chapter, it has been asserted that this paracuratorial aspect should be generally welcomed because it can be the space where different questions and solutions are grouped as a constellation. Therefore, it can further showcase unknown narratives, non-traditional artworks, and complex artistic subjectivities that are hardly addressed by pre-existing accounts of transactional curating.

What is needed for curators now is to remain sensitive to generating specificity in their discursive practices and to keep this creative value in opposition to definitive curating. As Maris Lind stated, discursive curating should work as a somewhat organic project, but at the same time, be very specific. It should take a work of art seriously and present it in close relation to the specific time, space, and contexts. This specificity will cumulatively build its own forms of communication, which can respond to the scepticism around discursive curating practice. Moreover, as explored with Adorno's notion of constellation, this sense of specificity can also multiply itself through further practices, keeping itself in a multifunctional and critical sense as its initial intent.

III. Discursive Curating with Contextual Specificity

3.1 Introduction

The practice of contemporary curating has become much more complex than the mere representation of art objects; today, it is deemed to entail more expansive and discursive frameworks that are perhaps growing out of the previous genealogy of curating. This tendency internally involves diverse means of exhibition display, and also externally spreads itself out across the wider range of socio-political and inter-subjective contexts. This research has explored a few international exhibitions and curatorial settings that presented different narratives and artistic subjectivities. Along with these examples, some recent debates on discursive turns in contemporary curating, particularly the one between Maria Lind and Jens Hoffmann, have been looked into. It has also been argued that the discursive mode of curating, although it operates with wider structures and fundamentals, has to develop more specified contexts in order to prompt a ‘dialogue’; otherwise, it would be out of reach of any possible interpretations.

Following this argument, this chapter will investigate how an exhibition can draw a ‘specific context’ and share it with viewers to set off a dialogue that provokes further discussions and interpretations. Keeping this question in mind, I will mainly examine my own curatorial practices throughout the chapter, in particular, *Map The Korea* (2012), *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists* (2013) and *After the Event* (2013), as well as their thematic developments as related to the aim of bringing ‘contextual specificity’ into the exhibition. As mentioned earlier, my curatorial projects discussed in this research explore a particular question; how the limited vocabularies of contemporary art and curating in the global art world can be questioned and expanded, specifically with examples of contemporary Korean art. It can be said that my projects are already involved with a sense of specificity because of their objects and questions, but it should be noted that this specificity merely lies in the question itself, not in its expression and articulation. In this regard, the chapter will closely investigate how and in what contexts this question has been asked and explored further in my own practice.

3.2 The Task of Curators

The notion of discursive curating is often discussed within the linguistic frame; for example, Okwui Enwezor and Sarat Maharaj brought the metaphorical meaning of

‘translation’ when they explained their curatorial attempts at the discursive exhibition.¹²⁹ Similarly, Mick Wilson used the term of language exchange¹³⁰ in illustrating a new paradigm of discursive curating. It is generally said that the practice of curating has some similarities with that of translation because both practices attempt to translate originals into representations. However, I believe that this idea of translation is more applicable to conventional curating than to the contemporary one, so-called discursive curating. As Maria Lind illustrates, contemporary curating is not about ‘representing’ originals, but more about ‘presenting’ its own narratives and qualities.¹³¹ Even though this curatorial practice mostly stems from and operates with specific originals, the practice itself evolves in a more emancipatory sense than that of translation. Moreover, the translational practice today is ever expanding and marks the passage to the new paradigm, entailing a far more complicated process and a broader practical regime. Therefore, it is not sensible to address contemporary curating with a simple comparison to translation. And yet, as mentioned, many curators tend to bring the idea of translation in illustrating their practices, and it seems that there are certain conditions shared by both practices; more precisely, both practices seem to share certain processual ‘struggles’. In this sense, a few translation theories can be explored, focusing on the ‘shared struggles’, and on this basis, it can also be discussed how those struggles can be dealt with and pushed further in contemporary curating practice.

Homi Bhabha in his *How Newness Enters the World: Postmodern Space, Postcolonial Time and the Trials of Cultural Translation* discusses the notion of language and culture and how they coincide within the question of cultural translation. In this book, Bhabha takes the novel *The Satanic Verses* written by the Indian-born British novelist Salman Rushdie, in developing his argument that there has been a certain binary set in translational practice. With the story of immigrants, Rushdie composes two separate models for how people - immigrants - enter the new world; either the migrants remain the same, or integrate into the new community. These two models are metaphorically taken by Bhabha, and based on that, he argues that there have been long-lasting major modes in translation theory: whether the translation should keep to the original source text as much

¹²⁹ See Sarat Maharaj, ‘Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other’, pp. 28-35. See also Okwui Enwezor interviewed by Paul O’Neill, ‘Curating Beyond the Canon’, pp.109-122.

¹³⁰ Mick Wilson, ‘Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns’, p. 209.

¹³¹ Maria Lind (ed.), *Performing the Curatorial: With and Beyond the Art* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2012) pp. 10-24.

as possible, or modify it in keeping with the new cultural setting.¹³² And this links to another long-time argument: whether the translation ruins the original texts or extends their lives.

This argument seems perennial. Walter Benjamin, for instance, also examines similar questions and argues in his essay *The Task of the Translator* that literary works contain essential information that translations should keep,¹³³ and the translator's main task is conveying this essential information. According to him, translation can extend the life of the original information and give the original a 'prolonged life'.¹³⁴ However, contrary to Benjamin, Jacques Derrida expresses a rather pessimistic opinion on the idea of translation and its ability to convey and extend the life of originals. He considers the idea of translation as crude coding. In his *What is a Relevant Translation?*, he maintains that "the practice of translation is devoted to ruin, to that form of memory or commemoration that is called ruin; ruin is perhaps its vocation and a destiny that it accepts from the very outset."¹³⁵ He further claims that it is not only the practice of translation that finds itself compromised, but also "the whole concept, definition and very axiomatics of translation, therefore, the idea of translation must be reconsidered."¹³⁶

This sense of negation is also seen in Bhabha's theory. To be specific, he does not consider either of the two long-lasting modes of translation in developing his translation theory. Instead, he argues that either side hardly works since the originals – the differences, in his context, across race, class, gender, and culture - are rooted in-between the pre-drawn boundaries. He states "in-between spaces provide the terrain for initiating new signs of differences because it is in the emergence of the interstices, and the overlaps of differences."¹³⁷ In this respect, it can be said that translation for him should not formulate a clear mode of representation, since the originals may not always be collaborative, but be

¹³² Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 1994) pp. 303-337.

¹³³ Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator, in *Illumination* (ed.), Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999) pp. 71 – 82.

¹³⁴ Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator', p. 72.

¹³⁵ Jacques Derrida, 'What is a relevant translation?' in *The Translation Studies Reader* (ed.), trans. Lawrence Venuti (London: Routledge, 2004) pp. 424 – 425.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 2.

‘profoundly antagonistic, conflictual and even incommensurable.’¹³⁸ Here, what Bhabha develops is not any great binary opposition of translation, but the notion of untranslatability, liminality and the need for a conceptual space between elsewhere, which is termed, the ‘third space’¹³⁹.

Both Benjamin’s notion of the extended life of originals and Derrida’s negation of translation can be found in Bhabha’s translation theory. Through the discussion, he reaches the conceptual space known as the third space, which acts as a point of resistance and a negation of complete integration. As one might know, it is Fredric Jameson who first opened up the notion of a third space in his *Postmodernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Likewise, he opened it as a disjunctive space where the tension is created from the negotiation of incommensurable differences, and where the non-synchronous temporality of global and national cultures is located.¹⁴⁰ The difference is that if Jameson dispels the possibility of the space, Bhabha appeals to the ‘third space’ as a potential space of dialectical thought beyond the binary of inside and outside, and also, originals and representations.

However, even with this conceptual work and suggestion of the third space, the questions of translation of newness or originals cannot be clearly answered, but rather, it seems, only dissolved. Not only in Bhabha’s theory, but also in other translation studies, as seen in the examples of Benjamin and Derrida, there is no particular task to accomplish anything beyond the sense of untranslatability, resistance and negation. Benjamin admits to the ‘fleetingness’ of translations and ‘poetic’¹⁴¹ of its practice even though he brings the idea of prolonged life, and further, Derrida demands reconsideration of the practice from ‘aphoristic to uncertain.’¹⁴² And all of these indicate that the practice of translation should be perceived as a non-substantive process; it will not be definitive and never be certain. Therefore, it has to be an on-going practice evolving with continuous acts of re-translation.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 312.

¹⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991) pp. 297 – 418.

¹⁴¹ Walter Benjamin, ‘The task of the translator’, p. 75.

¹⁴² Jacques Derrida, ‘What is a relevant translation?’, p. 424.

This non-substantive condition and the need for a continuous act of redoing in translation can be matched with the ‘struggles’ in the practice of curating. Similarly, contemporary curating should not be a mere representation of originals. And the actual task of curators is not transferring or relocating the originals, but setting up a site for reflective and revisionary reading and thinking of the originals. Similar to Benjamin’s idea of fleetingness and poetic space, curating practice can only present a small temporal site, which requires a repetitive process of rearticulation of the temporality. Here, both the acts of embracing and questioning, and of empowering and de-authorising the originals can happen simultaneously.

3.3 Dialogical Curating

This notion of untranslatability and its consequent failure seem to be premised in the infinite practice of translation and curating. And some curators develop their curatorial contexts with the recognition of that untranslatability and failure, based on the belief that less management of the original elements could show more content and discourses.¹⁴³ They take curatorial strategies of making a ‘discursive space’ between the originals and the representations, moving between different paradigms.

This idea of situating a discursive space within an exhibition is also essential to my curatorial practice. But through my practice, the notion of discursive is further developed into the notion of ‘dialogic’, with Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism. According to Bakhtin, there is always room for debate in a literary work because of its ‘latent’ meanings.¹⁴⁴ For instance, Bakhtin indicates that Dostoevsky’s work contains many different voices, which are hardly integrated into a single perspective or reading of the work. With the example, Bakhtin theorised dialogism emphasising different voices in and toward the work. Here, dialogism involves a certain refusal of closure and of dominant forms of coexistence. What dialogism means in his theory is not a juxtaposition of different perspectives or flattening-out of them. Rather, it means the dynamic ‘interaction and interplay’ between, and with, differences; therefore, it can produce new realities and various ways of reading.¹⁴⁵ In other words, it is incommensurability that activates dialogism. And more importantly, this incommensurability of dialogism has its

¹⁴³ See chapter 2.

¹⁴⁴ Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, p. 90.

¹⁴⁵ Mikhail Mikhaïlovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, p. xiii. See also Katerina Clark, Michael Holquist, *Mikhail Bakhtin* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986) pp. 138-253.

value and power only when it is in relation and interaction with other beings; otherwise, it cannot produce any new forms and meanings, but only monologist juxtaposition of difference. In this sense, it can be argued that dialogism is always developed with a sense of specificity or ‘addressivity’¹⁴⁶ that triggers the dynamic interaction although it pursues unfinalisability; only with a specific addressivity is it possible to initiate a vast multitude of meanings, and to establish engagement or commitment to them.

It has been explored in the previous chapter that so-called discursive curating has to generate more specified contexts to prompt a dialogue, then further discussions. The notion of dialogic in my practice aims to entail more contextual specificity. It works with the greatest reflection and circumspection on a specific original source. In this sense, this dialogic curating can be seen as a more specified and possibly individualised mode of discursive curating that still involves open-ended, performative, continual, and mutual recognition of artworks. Through the chapter, it will be explored how this notion has been developed, and how it can play an instrumental role in evoking critical questions, thereby pushing the limits of previously situated notions of Korean art. In this respect, three projects *Map The Korea* (2012), *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists* (2013) and *After the Event* (2013) will be discussed here.

3.3.1. The Possibility of Indeterminacy

A large-scale group exhibition *Map the Korea* in London in February 2012 was organised by Korean artists and curators working in the UK in order to question the term ‘Korean art’. It may sound paradoxical to question this elusive term by organising a large group exhibition with only Korean artists since the exhibition itself was already dwelling in the term and restraining some possible enquiries. However, the exhibition considered this paradox as a necessary prerequisite and asked itself how this condition could be taken and utilised as a platform for discussing the terms and categories of Korean art. Therefore, it can be said that this paradoxical condition was set as a ‘dialogical specificity’ within the exhibition, so as to reflect where the current image of Korean art stands and to ask how this can be further neutralised.

¹⁴⁶ This notion of addressivity is one of the key factors of dialogism in Bakhtin’s theory. He explains that dialogic cannot be unfold without its addressivity as every utterance has its addressivity. See Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, *Rethinking Bakhtin: Extensions and Challenges* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989) pp. 105 -149.

The exhibition *Map the Korea* is the fifth edition of 4482 [sasapari], the largest but possibly least known annual Korean art event in the UK. By looking over the history of Korean art in the UK and of 4482 exhibitions within it, *Map the Korea* questioned what this annual exhibition should aim for, rather than being a dull community art event under the national flag.

The 4482 exhibition originated in an open studio event; in June 2007, ten Korean artists organised this event in South London, showcasing their works. Following its launch, the open studio later that year was re-organised into a more formal exhibition, titled 4482, presenting the works of twenty Korean artists in the UK. The title, 4482 was rather impromptu and picked almost as a joke, fomred by simply combining the international dial codes, 44 for the UK and 82 for South Korea; the title was meant to be called *sasapari*, which is how 4482 sounds in Korean, instead of *double four eight two*. The first edition of 4482 coincided with the Frieze London 2007 as an attempt to get more attention from the broader art audience. However, it is uncertain whether the exhibition actually targeted the art market because the year the first 4482 launched, Korean artists in the UK were almost invisible; strict visa laws disallowed lengthy stays of Korean artists and restricted their artistic activities, and therefore, unlike today, a Korean art market and any sort of market-related status of Korean artists in the UK had hardly formed at that time.

It was only after 2007, when the UK government changed their visa policies and extended the visa permit for internationals, that the whole situation changed. More Korean artists started coming to the UK for their studies and professional careers, and simultaneously more exhibition opportunities arose for them; the Korean Cultural Centre UK opened in central London in the same year, and some London-based commercial galleries became interested in Korean art, in particular, the Saatchi Gallery, which embarked on showcasing Korean artists annually. Also, some established galleries from South Korea such as Gana, LeeHwaik, and Seo set up their trial offices in London to research and investigate a potential European market for Korean art.¹⁴⁷ In fact, along with the record-breaking sales of auction houses based in London, including Christie's and Sotheby's, the city itself became a gathering place for many international art galleries during this time.

In October 2008, the second 4482, organised by Paris-based Korean gallerist Sun Hee Choi, was tailored to this market situation. The exhibition was held in a bigger exhibition

¹⁴⁷ *Map the Korea*, exhibition catalogue, 2012, p. 11.

space at the Bargehouse, at the OXO Tower on the Southbank, presenting forty-six Korean artists working in the UK. It again coincided with the Frieze Art Fair 2008, with more public relations than before, and also more focused on its market approach alongside other collateral events, particularly designed for gallerists and art dealers. Although the name of 4482 was inscribed in a stronger sense that year and Korean contemporary art gained some sort of presence in the city, there were also some concerns voiced by younger artists over the exhibition's dedication to the market and the absence of a valid curatorial approach.

The 4482 exhibition expanded to become the biggest Korean art exhibition in the UK, and it became necessary to reconsider what this annual event should aim for, since it did not seem to present any critical contexts, but only individual artists and their separate works under the national frame. The exhibition almost assumed the form of a massive art fair without gaining much attention from its target audience.

With regard to this, the third and fourth exhibitions were subsequently organised. This third exhibition, subtitled as *Utopia/Dystopia: A place with Contemporary Views*, took place two years later in February 2010 with the participation of fifty-three artists. Then, in February 2011 the fourth exhibition was held, showcasing the works of sixty Korean artists in the UK, with the title of *Rhizosphere: Directions in Motion*.¹⁴⁸ As seen from their titles, these exhibitions aimed at presenting diverse works and narratives; most of the participating artists were students or recent graduates, whose works lacked any sense of homogeneity. Therefore, the exhibition started revealing a strong sense of irony, since it was presented under the national banner although it showcased works that were hardly contextualised in any national and cultural frames. Moreover, the instantaneously expected role of the exhibition to delineate cultural identity or promote cultural exchanges between the two countries also limited its framework. In this respect, a level of scepticism towards the exhibition was voiced among some Korean artists and curators, who faced a completely different situation from those who first launched the 4482 exhibition, despite the fact that only a few years had passed. Also, these new artists, and

¹⁴⁸ This title was derived from Deleuze and Guattari's book, *A Thousand Plateaus*. For further information on the exhibitions *Utopia/Dystopia: A place with Contemporary Views*, and *Rhizosphere: Directions in Motion*, see <http://www.4482.info> (accessed 6 April 2014)

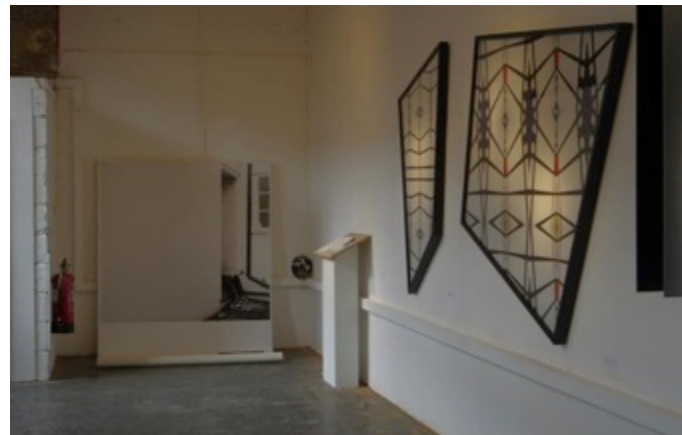
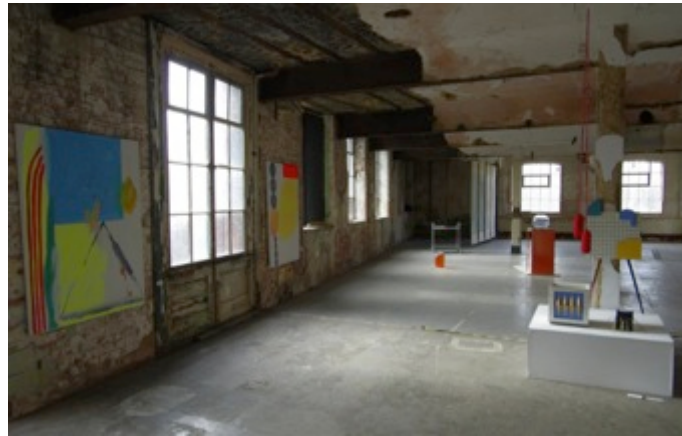


Figure 28: Exhibition views, *Map the Korea*, Barge House, London (2012)

with better possibilities to make an individual mark, started being hesitant about being involved in the exhibition.

The exhibition *Map the Korea* held in February 2012 aimed to share this history and irony expressed toward the annual exhibition (Figure 25). For this fifth edition, sixty-four Korean artists and five curators including myself were assembled¹⁴⁹ and discussed how the exhibition could be pushed forward beyond its prerequisite condition.

I took the irony and bias, which had been the centre and yet simultaneously constraining the exhibition, as material for discussion.¹⁵⁰ Then, I attempted to re-register the irony into a dialogical frame, which was first projected onto the exhibition title, *Map the Korea*. As seen, the title has a grammatical error with the use of the definitive article in front of 'Korea'. The intention here was to put the term Korea into a more speculative and uncertain territory by bringing a linguistic metaphor into the practice of curating. As discussed in the first chapter, the term Korean art can be seen as a product that has been manufactured, managed and celebrated within the received hegemonic grammar of the global art world. In this sense, the title aimed to cause the term to be located from that given grammar. However, this does not simply mean that the title only pointed in one direction: outside of the given grammar. Rather, it intended to draw attention to the double directionality of the exhibition: the dis-function of given grammar, and the function of dis-function, therefore playing a more performative role.

In particular, the notion of error within the dysfunction of given grammar raised a question of whether it would be possible to have any sort of common language. We often accept given language without questioning, and on that basis, we structure the world. However,

¹⁴⁹ List of Artists: Seokyeong Kang, Eemyun Kang, Rae Koo, Soon-Hak Kwon, Jukhee Kwon, Ga Ram Kim, Dong Yoon Kim, Minae Kim, SangHyun Kim, Shinwook Kim, Jieum Kim, Chinwook Kim, HaYoung Kim, Kyounghee Noh, Sean Roh, Jung Yun, Roh, Sejin Moon, Kyunghee Park, Kye Jung Park, Yeojoo Park, Je Baak, Jinhee Park, Chanmin Park, Chan-Hyo Bae, Seung Ah Paik, Mikyung Son, Kiwoun Shin, Fay Shin, Suk An, Jinkyun Ahn, Yoojung Oh, Min-jung Woo, Beomsik Won, Seoyoung Won, Jiho Won, HyesooYou, Suokwon Yoon, Sungfeel Yun, Jungu Yoon, Jiwon Yun, Dokyung Lee, Minjung Lee, Sunju Lee, Eunkyung Lee, Jungwoo Lee (Locco), SoYoung Jung, Sooim Jeong, Woon Zung, Yun-Kyung Jeong, Jihyun Jeong, Joy Jo, Haeree Cho, Haeyun Cho, Joohee Chun, Anna Choi, Yoonsuk Choi, Eun Sook Choi, Eun Ju Choi, Kaneumiah Choi, Shan Hur, Sookyoung Huh, JungPyo Hong, HeeRyung Hong, Ilsu Hwang. List of curators: Ji Young Lee, Jihyun Ahn, Gaenun Ji, Hyukgwe Kwon, Kko Kka Lee.

¹⁵⁰ As explained, the exhibition *Map the Korea* was a massive group exhibition curated by a group of curators. In this chapter, instead of explaining overall process of curating, I will mainly illustrate my own involvement and performance within the exhibition.

in return, the world constrains our thinking and understanding since it is formed based on the pre-given language. For example, it is certain that there are a lot of incommensurable differences within the given term Korean art, yet the term is being understood as if all the works of Korean artists reside in the same artistic world, at least being nuanced on that. However, there is no common language that everyone understands on the same level, at least in the contemporary art world. If there were a common language in the art world, it would be the ‘language of commercialism’.¹⁵¹ As explored earlier, this common language can be very problematic in the sense that it restricts the opportunity of struggling with the language and of expanding it into broader contexts.¹⁵² The exhibition title experimented with this limitation of common language, and attempted to shift the registration of the language, in particular in Korean art, and make people struggle effectively with and against the language to understand it in diverse ways.

3.3.2. Performative Mapping

The exhibition *Map the Korea* aimed to submit the term ‘Korea’ into an unsettling territory, and it was projected onto the title with the metaphorical use of grammatical error. This thematic frame was then practiced and presented through the idea of ‘mapping’. The works of sixty-four Korean artists imposed a sense of disjunction and loss of any measure of collective representability. Therefore, curating these works had to have some sense of belonging to the shared system in order to give a kind of ground that viewers could stand on, but at the same time, be aware of the limits of this shared system.

Here, the idea of mapping was a curatorial strategy for locating the diverse practices of sixty-four participants in the shared area, and as a means by which dynamic layers and different understandings could emerge. This mapping strategy was based on the belief that what was needed for the exhibition was to remain sensitive to the unframeable differences, along with greater seriousness and sympathy to the works, instead of simply managing them and suggesting a singular picture.

¹⁵¹ This aspect of common language of commercialism in contemporary art is extensively discussed in the previous chapter. See Chapter 1.

¹⁵² The notion of struggling with the language in my research is developed from Judith Butler’s notion of struggle. See Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004) See also Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, ‘Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification’ in *A Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Politics*, *JAC* 20. 4, 2000, <http://jaconlinejournal.com/archives/vol20.4/olson-changing.pdf> (accessed 20 January 2014)

In this regard, the practice of mapping in the exhibition was no longer a mere cartographic technique to represent the borders of territories, imposing a hegemonic relation or analytically visualising the already planned reality. Instead, it was almost like a performative process of reconsidering what was already known, and of inaugurating new grounds upon the hidden traces of the pre-perceived world. As a landscape architect and theorist James Corner claimed in *The Agency of Mapping* (1999), the practice of mapping today is more concerned ‘with what it actually *does* rather than with what it *means*’; now it is rooted in an idea of performance that is searching, disclosing and engendering new conditions, and also, estranging the fixed sets of thoughts.¹⁵³ By developing this performative sense of mapping, rather than the geo-political sense of planning, the exhibition attempted to (un)-map contemporary Korean art using the multiple voices of sixty-four Korean artists.

Even though the exhibition itself was a large-scale mono-national group show, its ultimate purpose was not a nationalistic presentation of a conclusive map of Korean art in the UK. Instead, it aimed to draw out plural readings of Korean art while undermining pre-situated routes or itineraries. With this purpose, five subcategories loosely grouped the artists in overlapping groups: Object, Site, Time, Subjectivity and Method. The categories evolved some fundamental notions that frequently arose from the discussions of contemporary art, for example, of materiality, site-specificity, real-time, identity and methodology. However, these suggested subcategories of the exhibition evoked an incomplete sentence, which was open to the hermeneutic task so that the audience had to find their own itinerary to complete it.¹⁵⁴ The actual exhibition looked like a collision of works in a sprawling and disordered setting, and it was meant to show the gatherings, conflicts and compromises of the exhibits. By experiencing multiple trajectories of ideas and relationships through the artworks, the audience could create their own journey re/shaping the mind-map of Korean art. In this sense, the idea of mapping does not necessarily mean the loss of differences or the act of planning. Instead, it means empowering singularities and differences in a shared system but with more hermeneutic task.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ James Corner, ‘The Agency of Mapping: Speculation, Critique and Invention’ in *Mappings*, Denis Cosgrove (London: Reaktion Books, 1999) p. 214.

¹⁵⁴ This strategy can be easily found from other discursive curating practices. See chapter 2.

¹⁵⁵ The project itself was carried out with other programmes and events such as performances, meetings and discussions, engaging with different institutions and individuals. Also, there was a smaller archive room within the exhibition, which presented the history of the previous 4482 exhibitions. This archive

Nonetheless, it should be noted that although the exhibition set rather clear aims and thematic frames, its actual practice was undertaken with many restrictions and limits. First, *Map the Korea* was a massive group show organised in a short period of time, and it was supported by and cooperated with other artist/curator groups, and bigger institutional bodies.¹⁵⁶ Therefore, its curating process often faced conflicts between different desires and needs, in which the practice inevitably had to make compromises and that involved extensive managerial and organisational tasks. Consequently, there was a certain lack of genuine communication with the artists, which limited building a specific relationship between the thematic frame and actual exhibits, and delivering them together to the public.

Moreover, unlike the exhibition's critical question about the commonality of language and its practical setting in performative mapping, the actual curating practice at a certain level was still based on the conventional mode of exhibition making. As discussed, the works were displayed to give multiple trajectories of reading, but the exhibition still evolved with very conventional acts of hanging and placing, and also with a typical form of catalogue, exhibition wall-text, opening event, public programme and so forth. In this regard, the exhibition was surely lacking some critical questions about the conventional mode of curating which operated with, and even supported, the logic of representation the exhibition originally attempted to question; therefore, it can be said that the question was only in part carried out throughout the exhibition.

3.4. Reconsideration of exhibition making

The limitations revealed in *Map the Korea* ushered me to other curatorial projects *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists* and *After the Event*, which were prompted by a similar aim to *Map the Korea*, that of questioning the term Korean art. These, however, were carried out with a more critical view of conventional exhibition making, and involved more interaction with artists. In particular, the inevitable managerial tasks within the exhibition *Map the Korea*, had been reflected on prior to the projects, which came to reconsider some constitutive factors in making an exhibition, for example, exhibition space, text, catalogue, opening event, et cetera.

section also included numerous artist portfolios of Korean artists working in the UK. See www.4482.info (accessed 6 April 2014)

¹⁵⁶ For example, it was partly supported by Korean Cultural Centre UK and also a few other artists groups.

To begin with, a series of interviews and conversations with the participating artists were carried out prior to the execution of projects, exploring their own experiences and opinions about the constituents. During the conversations, it was observed that the constituents in part govern an exhibition and form a certain kind of spectatorship. This observation was similar to Brian O'Doherty's famous assertion in *Inside the White Cube* (1976), that an exhibition space has become an international brand constructing our phenomenological readings of art.¹⁵⁷ Based on this, the curatorial projects were developed around two different but overlapping questions: how to test the displacement of conventional exhibition making, and within it, how to put the term Korean art into a more dialogical territory, not only at the conceptual level, but also in the practical sense?

3.4.1. Curating as Permanent Site of Crisis

Eight Korean artists – Euyoung Hong, Kiwoun Shin, Eun Sook Choi, HaYoung Kim, Bongsu Park, Ruby Kwon, Locco Lee and Jiho Won – were invited for the project *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists*. These artists were problematically but intentionally categorised as a group of 'Korean artists' within the project. This act of naming and categorising them as Korean should be seen as a part of the practice that aimed to disassociate itself from a sense of pure negation. It can be articulated with respect to Judith Butler's notion of 'necessary violence.' Butler argues that there is a necessary violence that must be committed in developing a critical practice. For example, "if woman is the word that produces argument, we must say it, use it and become dirtied by the language rather than circumventing or liberating it."¹⁵⁸ She further maintains that in so doing we can put the language in a 'permanent site of crisis', with no closure, but more public conflicts.¹⁵⁹

Of course, there were incommensurable differences among the artists within their practices, interests and even nationalities. For example, Ruby Kwon is a second generation Korean American, educated and practicing as an artist in the US before she moved to the UK. She has never visited and lived in Korea, and had no command of the Korean language. Similarly, Locco Lee has also never worked in Korea as an artist because he

¹⁵⁷ Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, expanded edition (Oakland: University of California Press, 2000)

¹⁵⁸ Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, 'Changing the Subject: Judith Butler's Politics of Radical Resignification'.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

came to the UK at an early age. His whole educational and artistic background was built outside the Korean context. Not only these two artists, but the other artists also grew up and were educated in different cities in Korea, and different countries such as Japan, France, the US and the UK. In this sense, the artists should be seen as transitional figures, embedded in the worlds of here, there or elsewhere, constantly translating between different cultures and societies. Based on this complexity, the project aimed to bind these transitional figures to present conflicts between them and reveal illegitimated singularities. It was more about opening up a dialogue between the artists and also with viewers, resisting easy categorisation of Korean art and avoiding a representative mode of exhibition. As a symbolic gesture of this, two empty white boards were hung on the wall before the start of the project, demonstrating the attempt at a dialogical setting without any pre-scripted curatorial statement to follow (Figure 26).

Unlike many other group exhibitions, each artist took over the project space for one assigned day and used it as his/her own temporary studio over the project's eight-day duration. Moreover, each artist produced and presented a new body of work instead of bringing appointed works and placing them in a given space. In this relay-like project, each artist physically and artistically engaged with what had been made and accumulated by the other artists who had occupied the space previously. And this dialogical process opened up some thoughts beyond the exclusive and reductive discourses of Korean art and addressed more discourses and artistic narratives.

For instance, one of the participating artists, Euyoung Hong, presented complex operations, conjunctions, and narratives. As an artist, she has worked on a series of installations and exhibitions in many different countries. Her practice mainly engages with two subject matters: the artist's acute interest in domestic spaces and their installation in a gallery space to arouse a sense of cacophony. Hong often takes an exhibition space as a home for her works to dwell in during the exhibition period. In particular, in her recent exhibitions in the UK, she has brought temporary domestic structures and objects such as a wardrobe, desk, and table-set from Korea or other countries outside the UK and installed them inside the exhibition space, causing a spatial tension between them.¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ See artist webpage <http://www.euyounghong.com/main.html> (accessed 10 January 2015)



Figure 29: Before the start of the project *Penumbra*, Bermondsey Project Space 2, London (2012)

Figure 30: Euyoung Hong, *Waiting Room, Penumbra: Day 1* (2012)

However, due to the frequent use of industrial and foreign objects, her works have often been sanctioned and even framed within a limited cultural context. For example, in one of her recent exhibitions, *Korean Eye 2012* at the Saatchi Gallery, it was mostly restricted to exhibiting a premade work - an installation of a Korean domestic scene. Therefore, the artist's direct interaction and interruption within the exhibition space, which is an essential part of her work, was not fully actualised, and her work was displayed as a neat object with less living context and interaction.¹⁶¹ Unlike this kind of exhibition, the project *Penumbra* asked her to work rather freely - nothing was actually asked - on her own narratives interacting with the project space.

The Bermondsey Project Space where this project took place is not a typical white cube space. Rather, it is more like a garage and workshop space and almost without any clear identity as an art space.¹⁶² On the first day, Hong took unexpected objects, such as a ladder, office chairs, and tables that had been left around the unoccupied space. Then, she installed a temporarily movable structure, titled *Waiting Room* – which was composed of two sets of foldable steel frames and vinyl sidewalls and ceilings, brought from Korea. Inside the *Waiting Room*, different domestic objects, collected from both Korea and the UK, and both inside and outside the project space, were placed confronting each other. The objects included plastic bags, fans, hangers, light bulbs, towels, and different types of chairs (Figure 27).

Such a temporary tent structure is frequently used in Korea for various purposes, but only 'outdoors' for street shops, temporary outdoor events and waiting rooms. The constructed *Waiting Room*, however, was built 'inside' the project space in London, and all the objects inside the *Waiting Room* were domestically used and were collected from various places. This kind of juxtaposition raised a level of conflict, tension and irony by opposing, transferring and overlapping the objects with embedded or imagined narratives. Also, the act of installing *Waiting Room* on the first day could be coincidentally ironic itself, in a sense that a waiting room can be a place that allows new events to happen, and at the same time could be one that holds people, ideas, and further actions.

¹⁶¹ Author interview with Euyoung Hong, artist, 10 September 2012

¹⁶² The use of non-art space as an exhibition space can also be found from other discursive exhibitions. In particular, *Documenta X* showed a level of rejection to white cube and took urban spaces in the city as exhibition spaces. See chapter 2.

Not only Euyoung Hong on the first day, but also the other artists on subsequent days responded to the given conditions and engaged with previously accumulated works/situations. For example, Kiwoun Shin, on the second day, presented a site-specific video installation as a response to the dual and conflicting atmosphere that Hong had created on the first day (Figure 28). He duplicated a door by filming an image of a real door, and then projected the virtual door on the wall just next to the real one. On the virtual door, different urban landscapes and events, which had been filmed in different places on the day and previously prepared, were played: trains were passing through and people in different cities were seen walking and talking on the street. By overlapping with the previous work installed by Hong, Shin took the exhibition space to delineate complex dimensions of realities and geographies. The use of pre-documented video and archival images of cities, and their dramatic release in his video installation showed cracking realities, and overturned the situated notion of space and geographies.

On the third day, Eun Sook Choi changed the ambience of the space. Choi built a temporary freestanding wall by using the same type of wooden panels that were used for covering the lower half of the project space. The wall was set to connect one of the four pillars, located in the middle of the space, to one of the sidewalls. Since the temporary wall blocked almost half of the space and was the only diagonal structure in the space, dividing and crossing a rectangular space, it had the spatial effect of disrupting and changing the whole ambience of the space. On the temporary wall, the artist painted and lined building an illusionary space that faced the virtual door produced by Shin (Figure 29).

On the sixth day, Ruby Kwon silently, but more directly, reacted to and engaged with what had been accumulated before. For example, Kwon made a fake projector and plinth with paper and placed them just next to Shin's actual projector and plinth that were projecting the virtual door just next to the real door (Figure 30).

Kwon also responded to the temporary wall painting installed by Choi, which was blocking half of the project space, thereby creating a new space behind; Kwon built another diagonal wall with cord lines just behind Choi's wall, mirroring its structure. Also, there were other small marks, which were almost invisible at a brief glance; such as a square on the floor labelled by blue tape, entitled *The Square for Special One* (Figure 31), and a small neon lamp next to Euyoung Hong's tent structure. Kwon's pieces were



Figure 31: Kiwoun Shin, Work in Progress, *Penumbra: Day 2* (2012)

Figure 32: Eun Sook Choi, Work in Progress, *Penumbra: Day 3* (2012)

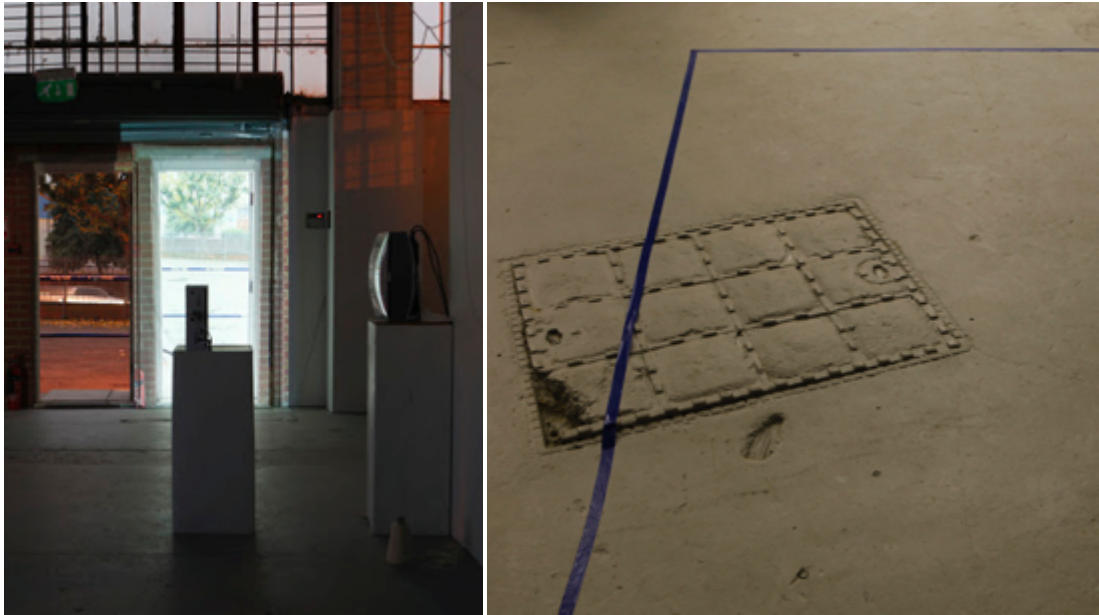


Figure 33: Ruby Kwon, Work in Progress, *Penumbra: Day 6* (2012)

Figure 34: Ruby Kwon, *The Square for Special One*, *Penumbra: Day 6* (2012)

Figure 35: Locco Lee, Performance, *Penumbra: Day 7* (2012)

seemingly even more temporary interventions due to the use of easily manageable materials such as paper, cord and tape.

Then, on the seventh day, Locco Lee set up a stage inside the tape work of Ruby Kwon, *The Square for Special One*. Lee picked pallets off the street and put them inside the square as a stage for the artist to stand on. He also brought the chairs out of Euyoung Hong's tent and placed them in front of the stage for the audience to sit on, and then invited people in from the street and started the performance. During the performance, he just shouted inside the square and walked around it (Figure 32). The performance took objects and people from an urban site outside the project space, but then it was given only the limited space of the square made by another artist.

In this way each artist brought to the project many different narratives and contexts; for example, it can be said that Choi's temporary freestanding wall painting discussed the symbolic value and function of an exhibition space, in particular, of white walls. It illustrated the white wall as a primary and absolute given system for presenting a painting, but at the same time, as a limited foreground. And within the project, she attempted to replace its value and function with her heterodox structure that completely changed the ambiance of the space, and which then became a work of art itself. Also, Ruby Kwon showed her interest in the idea of being no one, and in testing different ways of confirming her state of non-being. Actually, the state of non-existence had been her subject matter for some time, even before the project. For example, in 2012, for her studio-crit class at school, she did the following performance; she sent her friend to class to be Ruby Kwon and to talk in her name. 'Ruby' also gave out her name, phone and identification card. On the day, she existed physically, but this physical existence did not subvert her state of non-being, as it did not perform.¹⁶³ Similarly, in the project *Penumbra*, she installed a few physical interventions as illustrated earlier, but these pieces disclosed the state of non-being rather than acting it out.¹⁶⁴ Several artists' works were explored and interpreted, but as one might see, it is not certain how and in what ways each work engaged with the project since the works themselves were not fixed. In this sense, it should be noted that

¹⁶³ Author interview with Ruby Kwon, artist, 17 September 2012

¹⁶⁴ The artist could have been asked whether her interest in the state of non-being was somehow related to her background as a second generation Korean American. However, instead of asking this directly and acknowledging any sort of origin, the project was interested in seeing and presenting a work of art in its own right so that viewers could question the work and start their own dialogue.

apart from what has been illustrated here, there would be much analysis and elaboration of the works, which could be pulled in other directions.

The project order was decided based on a series of conversations with the artists that happened prior to the project, and there were some narratives and images expected from the order.¹⁶⁵ However, the artists were never asked what to make or present for eight days. Instead, they were allowed to write their own statements. The intention was to put different practices and subject matter together within a shared space and time in order to bring subversions, conflicts, and negotiation from the artists. Within this open dialogue, the artists did not illustrate or identify the term Korean art as something that they had to negate or move away from. Rather, their works showed far more complicated narratives, exploring both the inside and outside of the term, and pushing it into a different set of questions and understandings. Here, the project was not total chaos; rather it was a visualisation of different artistic subjectivities with less managing process.

After the finish of the eight-day project, a public end-view was held and the viewers were invited to the final scene of the project (Figure 33, 34). At first glance, it would be difficult for them to separate one work from another since the works were intermingled; even the final scene of the project could not be illustrated as one complete picture, rather the works could be seen as alive, constantly moving and interacting with each other. In order to drop the viewers a hint on the artist's thinking and making process, a small volume of artists' notes and drawings that contained the artists' initial thoughts and plans on the projects were given to the viewers on the end-view day. It should be also noted that the project space was open to the public during the eight days, and the whole process was being archived and shown online as well.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the end-view event was more for the participants and viewers to discuss and share different views on the project, rather than just celebrating its grand finale.

¹⁶⁵ For example, Bongsu Park, Ruby Kwon and Locco Lee were put in order since their works are based on very different subject matters. In particular, Park's work was based on the process of visualising her identity. In contrast, Kwon's work was more about proving her non-identity. It was expected some sort of conflicts or artistic conversation between the artists would be seen, however, in the project they worked separately rather than reacting against each other. Here, it should be noted that this sort of discrepancy in the project process was also part of the project and I believe that it could reveal more diverse narratives and realities beyond anything written.

¹⁶⁶ See <http://penumbra-project.blogspot.co.uk> (accessed 5 March 2015)



Figure 36: End View, *Penumbra*, Bermondsey Project Space 2, London (2012)

Figure 37: End View, *Penumbra*, Bermondsey Project Space 2, London (2012)

In this regard, it can be said that the project has overthrown two governing moments of exhibition making: ‘that of the catalogue being sent to the printer and that of the opening night.’¹⁶⁷ As many discussed, these two moments entail a level of managerial work for curators and artists, and also, frame artworks and leave gaps between the exhibits and the exhibition. Of course, an exhibition catalogue can provide some basic information and background knowledge, but it often stays distant from the actual exhibition and fails to illustrate transitory thoughts and their actualisation within the process of exhibition making. Certainly, this was not the case of the project *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists*. By reconsidering these governing elements of exhibition making,¹⁶⁸ the project tested the more dialogical mode of curating, opening up a participatory space not only for the artists but also for the audiences who visited during the project and the end-view, and whose presence completed the last scene.

3.4.2. Continuous Displacement of Representation

The fruits of the curatorial project *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists* could be further tested through its kiosk version, *After the Event*, conducted as a part of the group exhibition *Disruption: RCA Research Biennial Exhibition 2013*, with a similar curatorial strategy: bringing the term Korean art into a more dialogical space through the radical reconsideration of conventional exhibitions.

For the project, a proposal was sent to Korean artists and curators, living and working in the UK or those who once did, and it asked them to contribute some connotative objects that they thought in some sense represented their artistic subjectivity or current state in general. Eight artists/curators accepted the proposal and each one had to decide themselves what objects would be given for the project. The chosen and contributed objects varied from texts, small pieces of work, and different types of personal belongings, to other document-like objects.

I, as a curator, had no clear idea what objects would be given for the project, but prepared coloured tables and shelves for presenting the objects, only imagining what they might be. Then, after receiving the objects from the artists and curators, I made an arrangement

¹⁶⁷ Terry Smith, ‘What is Contemporary Curatorial Thought’, p. 45.

¹⁶⁸ Apart from the two governing moments: that of the catalogue being sent to the printer and that of the opening night, the exhibition also reconsidered other components of exhibition making, for example, exhibition text, space, and the role of artist/curator. And it is further developed with other practices. See Chapter 4.

while thinking and imagining stories between the people and the objects. Moreover, during the exhibition, other curators were invited to change the arrangement of the objects again and again. Three curators from different cultural, academic and practical backgrounds carried out three different versions of arrangements and presentations of the objects; I myself did the first one on the opening day of *Disruption: RCA Research Biennial Exhibition 2013*; a member of the audience did the second on the third day of the exhibition; and one of the curators of the exhibition did the last on the fifth day¹⁶⁹ (Figure 35-37). All these changing and rearranging events were open to the public and presented as a series of performances.¹⁷⁰ Significantly, any information about the participating artists such as names, their previous practices, and nationality was not given either to the curators or the viewers. What was disclosed to them was only that the objects contained symbolic narratives and represented someone's artistic practice or personal taste.

The project was based on an extensive usage of objects and re-arrangements, and it involved a continuous displacement of representation, activated both by other participants and viewers. This process of rearrangement yielded multiple outcomes and discussion points,¹⁷¹ and what has become clear through the discussions can be synthesised with following statement:

Wherever we position ourselves, and wherever we bring things into the viewed, it only serves to make us aware of the limits [...] We are unable to totalise the world, each time something slips out of our grip. We always grapple with the leftovers, the remainder of the un-presentable.¹⁷²

The idea of dialogical curating with an attempt at revising established practices of exhibition making was tested and developed in both projects, *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists* (2012) and *After the Event* (2013).

¹⁶⁹ An anonymous viewer and a curator Cristina Bogdan; they showed very different ways of arrangement of the objects. The objects signified many different narratives, and of course, both struggled to totalise them into a certain view. They presented their struggles differently: one presented the struggle with chaotic arrangement of the objects and the other presented a sense of impossibility of putting them into the viewed with the monotonous arrangement.

¹⁷⁰ The rearrangement schedule was informed through the exhibition website. See <http://cargocollective.com/disruption> (accessed 3 March 2015)

¹⁷¹ For the project, many artists gave their artworks that had never been exhibited before for various reasons, for example, size, content, style, design, etc. By exploring the works that could not fit into the current exhibition system, the project discussed the limits of contemporary curating.

¹⁷² Sarat Maharaj, 'Perfidious Fidelity: The Untranslatability of the Other', p. 34.



Figure 38: First Arrangement, *After the Event* (2013)

Figure 39: Second Arrangement, *After the Event* (2013)

Figure 40: Third Arrangement Performance, *After the Event* (2013)

Disruption: RCA Research Biennial Exhibition, Gulbenkian Galleries, London (2013)

As examined, both projects did not come up with an essentialist description of what Korean art is and what it should be. Rather, they aimed to test a new format of curating and reveal different singularities of contemporary Korean art, which are living but not necessarily fixed. The projects themselves were also engaged within the dimension of abstraction and open sphere rather than enunciation. One might argue that this abstraction and open sphere would only produce relations for their own sake and hardly articulate any real narrative. However, these relations would be the places where the encounters with different narratives are situated, and I believe that situating these potential encounters is more important than composing a clear picture, so that it can generate further thoughts and discourses beyond the limit of representative frameworks.

3.5. Conclusion

The chapter investigated my own curatorial projects *Map the Korea* (2012), *Penumbra: an 8-day project with 8 artists* (2012) and *After the Event* (2013), starting with the question of how to push the limits of a pre-given notion of Korean art. In particular, *Map the Korea* explored the idea of grammatical error and the practice of performative mapping with the question about the given language of 'Korean art'. The other two projects, *Penumbra* and *After the Event*, experimented with the idea of process-based and open-ended dialogue, questioning the given language of Korean art, and also of curatorial practice. Considering this idea, the projects created situations that remained deliberately open-ended or incomplete, in which the common language, in particular of Korean art and of curating, was put in a site of permanent struggle with no simple closure. Of course, this way of curating can possibly be followed by a sceptical question about the loss of curatorial direction, and considered merely as a failure and meaningless task. However, this curating is not about the process and turning an exhibition into a laboratory, but about pondering the function and dis-function of an exhibition, which keeps performing against and even subverting the dominant goal-oriented or progression-driven culture of exhibition making.

It can be said that the idea of situating a dialogical site in an exhibition was initiated from the translation theories, in particular, the notion of a 'third space', and also, from the study of discursive curating. At the same time, however, this 'dialogic' curating pushed the conception of the third space forward, especially its 'dialectic' structure, into more open and multi-faceted conversations. Also, it attempted to specify discursive curating by narrowing its ambiguity of discursiveness down into a more individualised and shaped form of dialogue. The practice was based on specific contexts reflecting and restaging

paradoxical conditions namely the terms Korean art and conventional curating, and at the same time, it aimed to keep its open-ended and discursive structure so that it could set off a dialogue that would bring further discussions and interpretations. The projects in this chapter were developed without resolving the tensions of combining differences. Instead, they aimed to unfold different narratives ‘without presentation of the monstrous truer-than-true.’¹⁷³ In terms of inventing a dialogical specificity, I believe that my practice presented certain points of relations and interactions, and yet, it still needs to develop more concrete and polemical grounds, which surely calls for further research and practices.

¹⁷³ Sarat Maharaj, ‘Dislocutions’, p.36.

IV. Fiction as Space of Encounter

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore two of my curatorial projects: *Richard Smith* (2013) in London and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* (2014) in Seoul. The projects were accompanied by continuous reflection on my previous projects and the development of further critiques on conventional curating in the global art world, particularly of contemporary Korean art. Through the examination of these projects, this chapter will illustrate the notion of ‘fiction’ as a potential space of ‘encounter’ or ‘collision’, where the mode of dialogical curating and the implications involved with it can be further tested.

Both projects were based on this written narratives of fictitious characters: Richard Smith and Eunsoo Hur respectively. With the presentation of the characters, the theatre-like projects keep their distance from the product-based and market-oriented exhibition curating. Instead, for these projects, I collaborated with artists in order not to come to an inevitable end of production, but to establish a dialogical space, where people can bring their own thoughts and questions. In this respect, this chapter will develop an argument that the installed fictional aspects in curating give more discursive room to artists and audiences, instead of giving them a fixed role to follow, the pre-written narrative of an exhibition.

Also, along with the argument, the chapter will illustrate how my curatorial strategy for critiquing the limited vocabularies of Korean art has been further developed and complicated; similarly to my previous projects, it highlights that the questioning of distorted and limited images of contemporary art should not simply be taking the opposite side of the conventions because it would possibly cause the adoption of the same politics of the conventional frames. In this sense, it will be argued that the questioning and critiquing strategy should be reconditioning and resignifying previously highlighted problems of conventional curating so that it can open up a reflective and revisionary space to encourage people doubt and question without easily closing it down or automatically insulting it. Based on this, two curatorial projects, *Richard Smith* (2013) and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* (2014) will be closely analysed in this chapter, specifically focusing on the different moments of ‘encounter’ that came about through the projects’ engagement with the notion of fiction.

4.2 Encounter Between Artist and Curator

Both projects were carried out in collaboration with two different artists: Minae Kim for *Richard Smith* and Ingeun Kim for *Eunsoo Hur*. The projects followed the logic of communication with a fluid approach to art making and exhibition curating, keeping the close interplay between the artist and curator. Instead of setting up a separated and limited role play between an artist and curator to comply with the mechanical practice of exhibition making, the projects were founded on the various encounters between the practitioners – artist and curator – and on mediation within that process. Here, both the artist and curator acted as a sort of mediator for each other. With less hierarchic formats of communication, the projects were seemingly grabbing hold of the other mediator's movements or flows rather than imposing a limit on each other's practice.

There might be some categorical and regulatory questions posed on this collaborative mode of curating: was this an artistic project or a curatorial project? And who did what? However, in response to these questions, it can be asked: is it necessarily important to draw a categorical boundary of what is artistic or curatorial? Is the category helpful in questioning the conventional mode of curating? There seems to be a certain tendency in the discussion of contemporary art of interpolating curating practice into academic discourse. At times, it seems even obligatory to deliver what at least should be fed into the academic discussion, and here, the boundaries between the role of artist and of curator seems to be the most popular subject for fulfilling one's obligation.¹⁷⁴

Of course, there have been sensible discussions developed with the categorical boundaries and their dis/function. To give an example, in her essay *When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator*, Elena Filipovic discussed several historical examples of artist-curated exhibitions, starting from Gustave Courbet's nineteenth-century shop *Pavilion of Realism* to Mark Leckey's recent exhibition *The Universal Addressability of Dumb Things*.¹⁷⁵ This essay started with the question of 'why the exhibitions curated by

¹⁷⁴ It was extensively discussed at the symposium 'Artist as Curator', with speakers including Elena Crippa, Ekaterina Degot, Elena Filipovic, Alison Green, Ruth Noack, Willem de Rooij, Valerie Smith and David Teh. The symposium was organised by Afterall, the University of Arts London MRes Art and RAW at Central Saint Martins London, 10 November 2012. See <http://www.afterall.org/online/7671/#.VHu06Yc00kY> (accessed 18 November 2014) See also <http://www.afterall.org/online/artist-as-curator-symposium-curator-as-artist-by-ruth-noack#.VHu2Tlc00kY> (accessed 18 November 2014)

¹⁷⁵ With these examples, Elena Filipovic pointed out that these artist-curated exhibitions created another kind of subversion of the model of exhibition making. See Elena Filipovic, 'When Exhibitions Become

artists remained so relatively impervious to historicisation'¹⁷⁶. Filipovic then illustrated how artists developed the potential of an exhibition as a medium, and how they radically tackled the established conventions of the exhibition.

It seems that the essay accomplished the mission of writing a history of artist-curated exhibitions, and indicated reconsideration of how an artwork or exhibition can be located within the recent tendency of blurring boundaries between the artist and curator. However, it can still be asked: how valuable is this kind of distinction, confirmation and historicisation in terms of developing a discussion on contemporary art practices that conversely trouble those distinctions and histories? If this study itself evolves with a rather problematic structure that is ironically preoccupied with a very strong dichotomy between artist and curator, there is no real reconsideration of the pre-drawn boundaries and divided norms.

We surely need a level of distinction and historicisation of practice in order to have a common ground to reflect and discuss contemporary art. And yet, as art historian Terry Smith indicates, what are needed today are not the categories but the discussions on the bigger picture of the situation¹⁷⁷ that structures and transforms the conditions of art practice.

Similarly, the philosopher Peter Osborne points out in his *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* that drawing a categorical boundary can be problematic since it can put contemporary art practices into 'closed blocks', limiting the scope of the practices and the interaction between them, which consequently help the global culture industry operate. He explains that the cultural industry today no longer merely makes mass products, but also reproduces highly sophisticated differentiation including, paradoxically, experimental and autonomous art. New and experimental art forms will be supported within this system and they will be spread with ever-increasing speed in order to feed the cultural industry and fulfil its need for newness.¹⁷⁸ Within this process,

Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator', in *Exhibition* (ed.), Lucy Steeds (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2014) pp. 156-168.

¹⁷⁶ See Elena Filipovic, 'When Exhibitions Become Form: On the History of the Artist as Curator', p. 156.

¹⁷⁷ Terry Smith, 'Artists as Curators/Curators as Artists', pp. 101-138.

however, standardisation and categorisation of newness will follow, and soon enough, the new and autonomous art will be deprived of its original value, playing no more than a component role for the bigger system. Here, the categorised art practice can remain rather closed as an ‘informant’¹⁷⁹ without further critical values.

The projects *Richard Smith* and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* considered these ‘closed blocks’ as a dead end where current art and curating practices were stuck. Thus, the projects followed a more collaborative mode of exhibition making, based on long-term communication overlapping different professional blocks.

In particular, during the project *Richard Smith*, I discussed with the artist Minae Kim that the current system of exhibition making tends to overwhelm its content more than a work of art, and in this situation, a work of art is often ‘engulfed’ and becomes ‘decorative gadgetry’¹⁸⁰ fulfilling curatorial or institutional missions. For example, the artist has participated in numerous exhibitions, from big museum presentations to small projects held in different countries for the past few years. For those exhibitions, due to the primary nature of site-specificity in her installation work, Kim was frequently asked to showcase new works for specific situations or present results undertaken in the same manner.¹⁸¹ However, some of the exhibitions were focused more on building their own grand narratives than communicating with or supporting the artist, and they were often a rush of a call for the artist. Therefore, the artist’s involvement in the exhibitions was occasionally composed on a limited level, and also it had to subsidise what had been already invented and written by others, i.e. the organisers or curators¹⁸² of the exhibitions.

In addition, there seems to be another problem: the artist found herself in an economically difficult situation even though she had had very productive years. This is because most of

¹⁷⁸ See Peter Osborne, ‘Art Space’ in *Anywhere or Not at All: Philosophy of Contemporary Art* (London: Verso, 2013) pp.133 – 173.

¹⁷⁹ Peter Osborne, ‘Art Space’, p. 164.

¹⁸⁰ Daniel Buren explains this tendency in his ‘Exhibiting Exhibitions’ (1972). See Daniel Buren ‘Exhibiting Exhibitions’ in *Exhibition*, p. 43.

¹⁸¹ Andrea Fraser explains that this type of exhibition boomed with the globalisation of the art world. See Andrea Fraser, ‘Service: A Working-Group Exhibition’, in *Exhibition*, pp. 60-67.

¹⁸² Daniel Buren ‘Exhibiting Exhibitions’, p. 43.

the institutions only covered the minimum production cost without artist fees,¹⁸³ and also, the work that Kim produced for specific sites and situations could not often be ascribed a market value. Even though some of her works from those exhibitions resulted in a more self-referential material form, the works themselves were still relevant to specific sites or situations; therefore, the original contexts of the works would be easily lost outside of the situations for which they were initially produced.

The project *Richard Smith* aimed to address this problematic condition of contemporary art practice. As seen from the above case, the ‘author’ of artwork and even of an exhibition in the contemporary art world might be none other than the very ‘organiser of events’. Based on this thought, we decided to invent a fictional character as a representation of the situation, and as a potential space where we could have (pseudo)-autonomy for our practice, at least during the project period. The fictional character was formed in collaboration with the artist, and acted as a place where the communication between the artist and curator could be activated. The invention of the character in this sense can be seen as a curatorial strategy of creating serial encounters and mediations between the artist and curator, beyond the conventional categorical boundaries and systematic role-play.

Richard Smith is the name of the fictional figure devised as one of the remaining residents in the Heygate Estate, South London, where all the residents were due to be removed owing to the redevelopment of the area, and where the artist-run project space Winter Projects was located. Smith, as his rather mundane name suggests, was characterised as a normal working-class man in his old age, and this character played the central role in this play-like, one-day art event, in place of the artist and curator. To be specific, he invited people to the event by notifying them that he wanted to share his personal memories gained within the area. The final picture of the project was also similar to a theatre set where the fictional character played a central acting role. Its setting looked as if some kind of private activity had been finished by the character just before the public opening.

¹⁸³ It can be said that most art centres and institutions see their role as identifying and publicising artistic tendencies, from which artists should later profit through the sale of legitimised work. In this system, if an artist is not in the market, no matter how often his/her works are shown, he/she could face economic difficulties. A similar situation is observed from the case of Hague Yang. See Chapter 1. See also Andrea Fraser, ‘Service: A Working-Group Exhibition’ in *Exhibition*, pp. 60-67.

On the day of the event, however, there was no actual actor or central figure in the project space. Richard Smith was not there; neither the artist nor curator was there. Only the invited guests were wandering around the space. The installed scene became centreless; rather it centred on the guests, forming an atmosphere of both absence and liveliness. Here, the audience had to react, depending on their own views and feelings through the residue of the just-finished and installed private activity, instead of being told about the story of Richard Smith and the event. The fictional narrative and the scene of the installation bound up with Richard Smith were converted into reflective observations on the character on the part of the viewers.

As discussed, the collaborative project *Richard Smith* was initiated as a critique of the problematic aspects of the systematised art world, with the argument that clear categorical boundaries do not allow any critical space for authors to activate. It was carried out in a reflective manner that restaged the problem by setting up a fictional character as the centre of the project, and dissolved the authorial positions of artist and curator. Through this, the project questioned the change of authorial status of contemporary art and artists.

It can be argued that the authorial status of an artist today is, at a certain level, being invented, managed and functioned by the bigger system of contemporary art. As Michael Foucault states in his *What is an Author?*, the author is not an indefinite source of signification that fills a work; “the author does not precede the work; he is a certain functional principle by which, in our culture, one limits, excludes, and chooses.”¹⁸⁴ Similarly, within the project, the subjectivity of the artist and her authorial status were neither entirely decentred nor secured, but the artist could have a sense of (pseudo)-autonomy through the fictional character; the artist could project her (loss of) subjectivity onto the fictional character, and yet, at the same time, keep her distance from the complete signification or signified.

In this sense, it can be said that the project did not work for the mean-ends rationality; the aim was not opposing or insulting the problem, but redirecting and transferring the project to the way it might function with a critical cognition of the situation, so that it can be no longer distant or distinct from the praxis of the situation, but absorbed in it without losing critical ability. Here, it can be argued that the fictional character within the project

¹⁸⁴ Michael Foucault, ‘What Is An Author?’ in *Aesthetics, Method, And Epistemology* (ed.), James D. Faubion, trans., Robert Hurley and Others (New York: New York Press, 1998) p. 221.

Richard Smith should be seen as a ‘critical re-signification’¹⁸⁵ of the conditions of art practice and authorial status of the artist. And it attempted to replay and restage the problems again and again in new and critical ways as fiction is always a part of reality.¹⁸⁶

4.3 Encounter Between Exterior and Interior

It has been argued earlier that what should be discussed in contemporary art is not the interior categories but the bigger structures that affect the conditions of art practice. Based on this argument, the project *Richard Smith* restaged current conditions of art practice by setting the fictional character, and challenging the systematised role of artist and curator. Following this, further questions can be asked: How did the projects deal with the external world of contemporary art and keep themselves open? What relevant discussions did the projects bring in?

4.3.1 Surroundings as Primary Sources of Curating

As discussed, through the presentation of the fictional character in *Richard Smith*, the artist aimed to impart a feeling of loss and incompetence to the public. The initial development of the project was based on the artist’s experience gained from the current art system. In addition to that, the narrative of the project also evolved with the actual situation of the project space; the gentrification of the Heygate Estate, and people involved with this situation.

The project space was located in the Heygate Estate near the Elephant and Castle, an area which had been vibrant and lively between the 1890s and 1940s. During this period, a diverse mix of young and professional people lived in the area, and it was popular for culture and entertainment, with a number of theatres and music halls. Then, after being devastated in the Second World War, the area was redeveloped, and the Heygate Estate was built in 1974 as a part of a redevelopment. The estate building itself was very close to the post-war architectural style, stressing the functionality and simplicity of living in the

¹⁸⁵ The idea was mainly developed from Judith Butler’s notion of radical resignification. See Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, ‘Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification’.

¹⁸⁶ One might see that the project also challenged the notion of gender. The artist and I did not really mean to include that aspect, but as the project itself attempted to re-signify the current conditions and problems, it is surely possible for viewers to set off a different narrative from the project. This relation with the viewers is further discussed in the later part of the chapter.



Figure 41: Before demolition, Heygate Estate, Elephant and Castle, London (2013)

Figure 42: Front view, Winter Projects, London (2013)

modern city.¹⁸⁷ All the blocks of the estate were linked to each other by a number of pedestrian concrete bridges, accessible to each other but possibly isolated from the open areas.

Since the 1970s, the Heygate Estate has been home to thousands of households as one of the largest housing estates in London. When the Estate was built during the 70s, it was possibly the most egalitarian decade in British history: the wealthiest 1% earned less than 6% of the national income in Britain, the lowest recorded level in the history of the country.¹⁸⁸ During the decade, a sense of aspiration was shared across the country, and utopianism was in the air. However, what was around the corner was not a utopia; cracks in society were already visible in massive inflation and strikes. The post-war boom was almost over and raw capitalism was on the way. And today, the wealthiest 1% in the world earns more than 48% of the global wealthy.¹⁸⁹

Similarly, although the Elephant and Castle area thrived during the 70s and 80s as an important hub of south London, many of the issues it faces today had their origins in this period of modern development. Around the area, slum developments emerged to house the expanding population, and a lot of residents increasingly faced poor living conditions. This part of London was then known as a ‘failed utopia’¹⁹⁰ with grey concrete, noise, a big old shopping centre and a high level of crime. Consequently, in 2008, instead of renovating the area, the government announced a master plan for demolishing the Heygate Estate so as to regenerate the area of Elephant and Castle, and all the Heygate residents were to be removed from the estate (Figure 38). While the project was in preparation, some residents who were moved off the estate claimed difficulties in finding a new home elsewhere in the city, and some residents still appealed for alternatives to the demolition. Also, the project space, which was located on one of the pedestrian bridges, was about to

¹⁸⁷ See Matthew Wilson, ‘Hidden Forest at the Heart of London’s Heygate Estate Regeneration’ (published online 2 May 2014) <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/bf9d750a-cb9f-11e3-8ccf-00144feabdc0.html#slide0> (accessed 25 November 2014)

¹⁸⁸ Anthony Barnes Atkinson, ‘Wealth and Inheritance in Britain from 1896 to the Present’, Case 178, November (webpage) 2013 <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/58087/1/CASEpaper178.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2014)

¹⁸⁹ See ‘Credit Suisse Global Wealth Report’ (webpage) <https://publications.credit-suisse.com/tasks/render/file/?fileID=60931FDE-A2D2-F568-B041B58C5EA591A4> (accessed 19 October 2014)

¹⁹⁰ See the interview with Adrian Glasspool who was one of the remaining residents at the estate. Stephen Moss, ‘The Death of Housing Ideal’, (published online 4 March 2011) <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2011/mar/04/death-housing-ideal> (accessed 25 November 2014)

be demolished under the re-construction scheme, and the artists who ran the space and used it as their studio had to find another venue¹⁹¹ (Figure 39).

Both the artist and I could sympathise with the situation, and find some commonalities between the area and the operation of the global art world. For instance, east London, despite the astronomical price of property, had the highest density of art spaces in Europe, with fifty-four art galleries just in that part of the city. The city itself is also home to a number of art fairs, for example, the Frieze, Zoo and a few others.¹⁹² However, many artists, especially those who are not in the high-profile art world, have to keep finding alternatives to living and working in the city, and even if they take part in the art world, they can be easily engulfed and managed by its ever-expanding power of commercialism.

Considering these matters, we decided to bring together the situation of this area and of the art world by transforming the project space into a theatre-like space where people could reflect on both situations. For the preparation of the project, we first researched the area; we walked around the area for a few days, read some papers about the remaining residents, and also researched some films, music, and other pop culture related to the area.¹⁹³ Then, we characterised Richard Smith and set up his private space throughout the project space.

The window of the shop-like space and some parts of the existing wall were toned down with semi-transparent curtains, which created an atmosphere somewhat between a street shop and private house. Kim then meticulously installed sets of indoor airers both inside and outside the space with wet clothes on, and made some parts of floor, mainly under the airers, blue to indicate the dripping water (Figure 40). In addition to that, her schematic drawings on manuscript paper were hung on the white wall in lines, some behind the

¹⁹¹ Demolition of the estate has been undertaken in two phases. The demolition of both the former Rodney Road and Wingrave blocks were undertaken in early 2011 and completed in May 2011. The demolition of the main estate commenced in October 2013 and completed in November 2014. See http://www.southwark.gov.uk/info/200183/elephant_and_castle/1124/heygate_estate (accessed 15 November 2014)

¹⁹² Dan Fox, 'A Serious Business', *Frieze* (published online 12 March 2009) http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/a_serious_business/ (accessed 1 November 2014)

¹⁹³ For example, Stephen Moss, 'The Death of Housing Ideal'; Owen Hatherley, 'After the Heygate estate, a grey future awaits'; films including Daniel Barber's *Harry Brown*; and music videos including *Hung Up* by Madonna and *Love Don't Let Me Go* by David Guetta.



Figure 43: Project view, *Richard Smith*, Winter Projects, London (2013)

Figure 44: Minae Kim, *A Study of Lee Junho* (2009) installed in *Richard Smith* (2013)



Figure 45: Project view, *Richard Smith*, Winter Projects, London (2013)

Figure 46: Storage view behind, *Richard Smith*, Winter Projects, London (2013)

Figure 47: Entrance view, *Richard Smith*, Winter Projects, London (2013)

curtains. The drawings came from her previous publication project¹⁹⁴ in collaboration with other artists and curators, which described a story about an anonymous person (Figure 41). And a hand written memo was left on the other side of the wall: “I am released on the heights in but I will dream about the door” (Figure 42).

Moreover, there was a half-hidden storage space just behind the exhibition area. Selected songs streaming from the hidden place were heard over the wall. On the day of the event, people were allowed to see and visit the storage space through the half transparent curtain. Unlike the meticulous installation of the surreal scene in the project space, the storage space was in a total mess, forming a rather melancholic atmosphere: furniture, boxes, electric cables and other materials were scattered all over the place and also unfinished works by other artists were piled up at the corner. During the one-day project, one light was obliquely put on the floor of the storage area, facing one side of the walls (Figure 43).

This kind of identity, invented together with the portrait of a bigger society through an installed situation, can be linked with many of the previous works of Minae Kim. As an artist, Kim has shown her interest in the introspection of self and its surroundings and had often taken the forms of site-specific installations and metaphorical objects to deliver the essence that illustrates the dilemma of contemporary lives and endless compromises within contradictory situations.¹⁹⁵ For this project, instead of eliminating surplus to build an essential structure, Kim created a temporary situation that audiences could actually experience rather than merely look at, and within the process, the project space’s environmental aspects and architectural features were actively considered as primary sources. The surrounding area was taken as a kind of metaphor and testament to the ways in which the problematic aspects of the global art world have been constructed. And through the fictional character written as living in that area, the project illustrated different socio-economic situations and stories both inside and outside of contemporary art (Figure 44).

4.3.2 Peculiarity of Double-sidedness

Another curatorial project, *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase*, pivoted on the interview with a fictitious character, Eunsoo Hur, characterised as an internationally renowned Korean

¹⁹⁴ *Novel 01: Footnotes without Text* (Seoul: Roundabout, 2009)

¹⁹⁵ Minae Kim’s work was discussed in the previous chapter. See chapter 1.

artist. Similar to *Richard Smith*, the project was developed with reference to the socio-economic situation that affects contemporary art, for which the project space and its surrounding aspects were regarded as curating materials.

To be specific, the project space STAGE 3x3 was a small window space of slightly over three metres squared, sitting right by a bookshop on the ground floor of the Daehakro Art Theatre in the centre of Seoul. The Daehakro area, where the project space is located, was home to a number of experimental theatres, music halls and non-profit cultural institutions, but as the city developed, many of them had to close down and were replaced with trendy shops and restaurants. As one of the biggest theatres still remaining in the area, it is usually busy with performances and events, and crowded with people, whereas this small window space facing a byroad is rather quiet, looking remote from its surroundings. The project space had this double sided-ness of peculiarity not only with its surrounding atmosphere but also with its function: the window space previously had been a notice board, and was only recently reborn as an art project space. Thus, the space itself looked different from a conventional white cube, but the norms and functions of the space still remained subordinated to the conventional display as a typical window gallery space (Figure 45).

The *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* is a theatrical exhibition that utilised the peculiarity of this double-sided space in order to present the ambivalent and contradictory values of artistic presentation. While the typical red stage-curtain hung halfway down the window, a big monitor sat on a pedestal inside the window, which created an image of a theatrical stage that had yet to be arranged (Figure 46). On the screen, one could see a repeated playback of the video interview with the fictional artist, Eunsoo Hur. This roughly thirty-minute-long interview video was filmed in advance, and involved exchanging the roles of artist and curator: Eunsoo Hur, the main character, was performed by myself - the actual project curator, and the collaborating artist Ingeun Kim asked him questions as an interviewer (Figure 47). The conversation actually referred to other international artists and curators'; a number of interviews, talks and seminars by other art professionals were previously researched, collected and edited, and then, faintly and oddly juxtaposed in

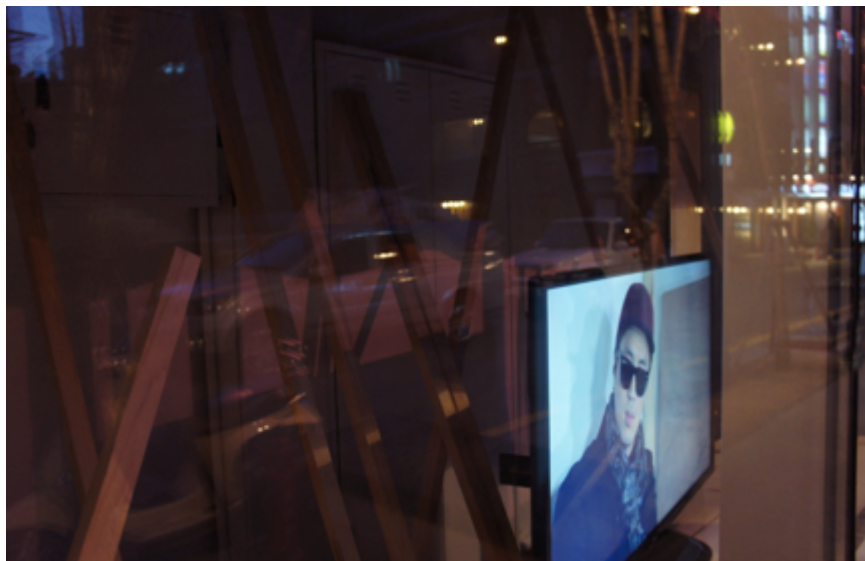


Figure 48: Street view, *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase*, STAGE 3X3, Seoul (2014)

Figure 49: Project view, *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase*, STAGE 3X3, Seoul (2014)

Figure 50: Project view, *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase*, STAGE 3X3, Seoul (2014)

Eunsoo Hur's conversation.¹⁹⁶

During the interview, the artist Eunsoo Hur explained his own experience of making artworks and persistently criticised problematic aspects of contemporary art. He talked relatively straightforwardly and seemed to raise a few persuasive points.

However, what he said merely reproduced what others had already pointed out and had been repeated many times on different occasions; therefore it became nothing more than stereotypical art talk. Throughout the interview, the artist kept his private thoughts and real opinions to himself. In this process, the artist contradicted and soon compromised himself by hiding his own flaws through his criticism of others. Thus, the interview consecutively revealed habitual artistic compromises revolving around art without any valid criticality.

The artist's talk in the interview was no more than self-justification, and his critique was one way of gaining visibility in the global art world. The logic of commercialism and professionalism also operated in his talk. In *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1880*, the historian Harold Perkin argued that what professional actually means is to persuade the rest of society that his or her 'service' is vitally important in the 'market' and therefore worthy of guaranteed reward.¹⁹⁷ Based on this logic, it can be said that professionalism shares the logic of commercialism in part. The art world has developed into a highly-visible international entertainment, which has generated certain images of art professionals and some fixed ways to become one; from producing artworks to exhibiting them, curating, teaching, archiving, selling the works, and then selling other non-art objects. And also, today's high-speed image circulation amplifies the canon; for example, *Artforum's* online section *Scene and Herd*¹⁹⁸ perpetuates certain images of art professionals and of what they are involved with. Given this situation, there seems to be little margin in the global art world for unforeseen accidents.¹⁹⁹ Many professionals follow

¹⁹⁶ For example, a round table discussion 'The Trouble with Curating' with Andrew Renton, Emily Pethick, Penelope Curtis, Steven Claydon and Pavel Buchler at the ICA, 9 December 2010; and a symposium 'Artist as Curator' with Elena Crippa, Ekaterina Degot, Elena Filipovic, Alison Green, Ruth Noack, Willem de Rooij, Valerie Smith and David Teh at Central Saint Martins London, 10 November 2012.

¹⁹⁷ Harold Perkin, *The Rise of Professional Society: England since 1800* (London/New York: Routledge, 1989) p. xiii.

¹⁹⁸ See <http://artforum.com/diary/> (accessed 5 May 2015)

¹⁹⁹ See chapter 1. See also Maria Lind, 'Contemporary Art and Its Commercial Markets'.

exactly the same rules of commercialism in recognising how to behave and what to do, say and criticise, to gain visibility in the art scene. Here, the lives of successful artists tend to become more identical, and only the art that achieves success in the market becomes art.

The fictional artist Eunsoo Hur was characterised as a typical professional in the art world in this project. And yet, the project involved neither an introduction of experimental art nor the self-exploration of an eccentric artist. Moreover, the project was not simply about mocking what other professionals have said before. It was rather about portraying an art professional today and introducing a feeling of discomfort by looking at and listening to his disguise. This video interview was shown to the public for two months in a very crowded area of Seoul, and as the portrait was projected through transparent glass, it compelled the viewers to face and reflect on themselves. In this way, the project supported a process of confronting and rethinking of oneself. In this respect, it also can be said that the project illustrates that all of us are seemingly part of the problem, and asks us to reflect on ourselves and discuss the problem by talking about the ‘talking’, but not just for the sake of ‘talking’.

The aim of the curatorial projects *Richard Smith* and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* started from introducing a fictional dimension, which would allow people to reflect not only on the interior of art objects but also around the diverse contexts surrounding them. The projects attempted to take the current art system into consideration not in order to dismiss them but rather to problematise them, and within this implication, the projects could extend their discussions beyond the realm of art.²⁰⁰

Many art exhibitions, regardless of the differing nature of the artworks, tend to be focused on visual and textual representation, purveying general information about art to the public. Beyond this role of delivering information in curating, my projects experimented with how to introduce a dialogical space for critical discourses through interdisciplinary collaborations with the artists. The projects in fact had only a small number of barely legible artworks, and they might not have provided enough information for the public to get directly into the debate. However, there was potential for multiple experiences and the exhibitions encouraged those experiences, alongside the project’s various references, narratives, and histories. And the fictional aspects of the projects were critical in

²⁰⁰ While one project took place in London and the other in Seoul, the issues at stake are pervasive and part of the contemporary art world everywhere.

stimulating viewers to encounter the potential of multiple experiences and actively engage with them.

4.4 Encounter Between Fiction and Audience

The projects *Richard Smith* and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* considered the viewer as a crucial figure whose involvement can help to articulate critical issues. The projects invited viewers into enigmatic situations; they were brought in without being informed what the projects were based on, or that they were developed with a fictional narrative. In particular, on the opening day of *Richard Smith*, viewers were invited into the private space of the fictional character Richard Smith, however, what they first encountered in the space was a strange scene of an installation. Within that situation, the viewers had to depend on themselves, looking at the exhibition and imagining a narrative behind it, instead of being informed about the story. Also, for the project *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase*, the interview with the fictional artist Eunsoo Hur was shown to the public on the street for two months without any acknowledgment of the real source of the interview. Similar to the case of *Richard Smith*, the public, watching the interview with the character, had to deal with a certain absurdity and inconsistency in the interview's content and translate that into their own arrangement and understanding.

The idea of the enigma and interpretation by viewers indicate essential aspects of the projects: 'encounter' and 'mediation'. Both projects started and ended with a series of unexpected encounters, initially with the artist and later on with the audience. In this regard, it can be said that the projects were involved in an on-going collaborative process from the very beginning to the very end. If the initial collaboration with the artists happened as a result of questions about the professional boundaries in contemporary exhibition making, the later collaboration with the audiences happened through the enigma that emerged from the fictional narratives. The viewers in this process encountered enigmatic situations and translated the exhibitions according to their own conceptions. It is a cognitive process that estranged them from habitual looking and thinking about an exhibition. It has been argued in the previous chapters that representative curating constrains our looking and thinking and deceives us into believing that we all inhabit the same level in the visual world. Unlike this representative curating, my projects attempted to foster individual acts of looking and thinking rather than defining any given routes to follow. Here, the act of looking was deemed a sensory process that happened prior to the given knowledge and understanding. Therefore, by creating a space for individuals to see

anew, the project aimed at encouraging people to open up to more thoughts and ideas about the works.

The projects were not set to be transparent or informative. The viewers in the projects were asked to write their own readings of the exhibitions. They were not just spectators or disciplined objects in the exhibition space. Instead, they were the acting subjects where all the questions and different narratives of the exhibition were mixed together. This idea of making a work of art as a potential trigger for participation towards further discussion is nothing new when considering some historical movements in the contemporary art world.²⁰¹ The notion of democracy and emancipation was rooted within these arts, but at the same time, it claimed for art a unique role in regenerating creativity and its values in opposition to materialistic culture. And this idea has been shared and developed by many thinkers, as seen from Walter Benjamin's *Author as Producer* (1934), Umberto Eco's *The Open Work* (1962) and Roland Barthes's *Death of the Author* and *Birth of the Reader* (1968). In particular, Roland Barthes wrote that:

The text is a tissue of questions drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. Thus it revealed the total existence of writing: a text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody and contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. The reader is the space on which all the questions that make up writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text's unity lies not in its origin but its destination.²⁰²

Barthes's view on the relationship between the text and reader could well explain the nature of my projects with their focus on the act of viewing. But here, Barthes's ideas, especially that the unity of a text lies not in its origin but in its destination, were further redirected through my projects. In the same text, Barthes maintains, "The birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author".²⁰³ However, my projects did not replace the author with the reader. Rather, the projects took both notions of origin and destination as illusive. The practice of representative curating seems to have clear

²⁰¹ For example, the Fluxus Movement, Performance Art, Institutional Critique, Relational Aesthetics, and so forth. See Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art After Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1984) See also Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (eds.), *Institutional Critique: An Anthology of Artists' Writing* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2011)

²⁰² Roland Barthes, 'The Death of the Author', in *Image-Music-Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977) pp. 147-148.

²⁰³ Ibid.

distinctions between subjects and objects; origins and destinations; artist and audience; actor and spectator, et cetera. For my curatorial practices, on the contrary, differentiation between subject and object, and origin and destination barely matters; the primary consideration is the relationships, which are not divided into a destination following after an origin, but rather coexist as diverse origins of thoughts.²⁰⁴ Here, the origins are continuously on a flow and being interrupted and overlapped. Therefore, there can never be a clear starting and ending point throughout the process, and thus the audience cannot be the final destination of the projects.

If a curating practice originates from a clear subject and ends up with a certain object, it would arguably be premised on a fake operation or representation. And these fake beginnings and endings would provide us with an erroneous illusion of production, consumption, and identity. In this sense, the main goal of the projects' focus on individual viewing should not be the transformation of the viewers into creators, nor spectators into actors, but rather should be more about understanding the mutual interactions and activities that already existed and at work within the act of viewing.

Also, it should be noted that there were only fractured sentences and enigmatic words imparted to the viewers in the exhibitions. This estrangement and difficulty of reading was in some ways essential for them to open up new ways of thinking about the artworks and artists. This also indicates that the projects needed a mediator at almost every moment, as they could never express themselves without a mediator. The viewers as mediators and collaborators on the projects had to write their own mode of translation of the exhibitions by opening up their thoughts and ideas. They could create something new by writing their own words over the words given to them, and create another sentence inside the written language of exhibition.

Of course, there might be misreadings and mistranslations of the exhibitions from the viewers, but those should also be regarded as different readings and thus supporting the purpose of these exhibitions. An exhibition often takes artistic or curatorial intentionality too much for granted: it assumes that an artist or curator fully knows what he or she is doing and can control the meaning of the practice. The problem with this belief is that one

²⁰⁴ This idea of multiple origins and of illusive beginnings and endings was developed from 'A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia'. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd, 2004)

can only say what can be said or what one can most articulate about, which can ignore broader aspects of the works.²⁰⁵ The work can never be determined by any means of articulation or representation. In the projects, one of the main roles expected from the viewers was to falsify the presented ideas of the exhibition. As previously mentioned, the presented ideas were produced within the assemblage of different narratives, characters and references. The audience, as a translator or another writer in the exhibition, cannot help but falsify them. The falsification here is a creation of a new assemblage of ideas and narratives. The projects encouraged each viewer to consider different assemblages and frames, which were always accountable to the original ideas. The falsification by the viewers could be seen as a positive reproduction of the projects through fresh encounters, mediation, transformations, and creation.

It can be seen that the projects were based on a journey without any given destination. The exhibitions and the audience stayed in a status of constant flow of ‘becoming’ rather than at a terminus. The fiction was introduced to the audience as a potential trigger for the first moment of encounter to occur. Different things met through the encounters, and the moments of meeting were prolonged and translated into a new mode of reading. Here, the fiction did not function to represent any definitive artworks or artists. Its narrative was developed within a very specific context, rather than being removed from reality. Based on this argument, it can be said that the notion of fiction in my projects was located in-between the abstract and the figural situation of an enigmatic space, in order to foster a new and fresh act of viewing and generate a sense of intensity and anxiety within the event of encounter.²⁰⁶ Consequently, this acted, not as an end but as an extension of the end, putting every conclusion in suspense.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the idea of dialogical curating in my practice has been further tested with the strategy of situating a fictional space within an exhibition. In this process, ‘fiction’ was illustrated as a potential ground for planting different points of

²⁰⁵ Louise Lawler states that an artwork can never be determined just by an artist or what he/she says; its comprehension is facilitated by the works of others and just by what’s going on at the time. See Louise Lawler, ‘Prominence Given, Authority Taken: In Conversation with Douglas Crimp’, in *Exhibition*, pp. 49-54.

²⁰⁶ This argument was largely developed from Gilles Deleuze’s text on the work of Francis Bacon. In particular, Deleuze argued that Bacon’s works in effect followed a middle path between two extremes of abstraction and figural, and attained a sensation that is neither cerebral nor rational. See Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005)

encounter that would allow both practitioners and viewers to have multiple experiences, further thoughts and discussions beyond the closed blocks of current boundaries.

To put it briefly, both projects, *Richard Smith*, and *Enusoo Hur: Showcase*, invented fictional characters in collaboration with artists, and these characters acted as a neutral communication space where the artists and curator could work with less hierarchic and systematic role-play. Also, in presenting those characters, it was possible to re-signify and restage the current conditions of art practice with context-specific and place-specific narratives that dealt with broader socio-economic discussions, not just within the realm of art. On the basis of this curatorial framework, the exhibitions could build a concrete model of questions and communications, and brought fullness of thought and pensiveness of viewing. In this process, different readings of the exhibitions could emerge, interfering with already situated knowledge and developing further critical thinking.

What does critical thinking mean then? In my projects, it means continually calling existing things into question, not necessarily to take away from or directly attack them, but to discover new relations and organise new communicative situations with them. Specifically, this research project questioned the limited vocabularies of contemporary Korean art and of its curatorial frameworks in the global art world, and it was argued that the market logic of the global art world has always been with the problematic representation of the art. Yet, instead of disposing of the pre-given notion of Korean art and the market, I attempted to discuss how we could reflect upon the situation and assign new meanings and contexts to shift them. I believe that one of the greatest limitations within the act of critique is its inability to look beyond its own language. What was suggested in my projects was an act of reflection and re-signification of the problems of opening up different forms of critique from within. This strategy of ‘taking and giving it back’ can produce its own logic, by counterposing the simple act of resistance with a more complex set of relations with the problems. Such a stance means learning to ‘live in the anxiety of that questioning without closing it down too quickly’²⁰⁷ so that it can avoid bad concreteness and bad generalisation, but provide more disturbing moments to the smooth surface of the global art world.

²⁰⁷ A. Olson and Lynn Worsham, ‘Changing the Subject: Judith Butler’s Politics of Radical Resignification’.

Conclusion

This research began with the question of how the practice of contemporary curating in the global art world has dealt with the dynamics of contemporary art and whether the practice fixates the multiplicities of contemporary art in a limited vocabulary, based on a homogeneous pattern of cultural representation. Through the examples of contemporary Korean artists, the first chapter argued that contemporary curating still categorises a work of art into preconceived cultural frames. In many cases, contemporary exhibition often presents Korean artists within the rhetoric of glamorised otherness, instead of unveiling the genuine narratives of artworks and contextualising them in a broad sphere. I considered the persistence of this rhetoric of cultural foreignness in curating, and discussed that the market logic of the global art world is one of the main reasons for this problematic curating. The research indicated that this market logic has increasingly dominated the globalised art world, and left a very small margin for ‘non-marketised’ art practices. There is a certain tendency for major institutions and art centres, and also for individual practitioners, including artists, curators, historians and critics, to cooperate with the market through their heteronomous practices in order to gain approval from the integrated art world. Consequently, the global art world has manufactured a so-called ‘Chinatown culture’ that does not bear any similarity to reality, but reflects the supposed cultural otherness demanded by the art market that is centred mostly in the USA and Western Europe.

The research brought up a few more problematic aspects of the global art world, which can also be considered correlative to its market system. In particular, it argued that this highly ‘systematised’ and ‘professionalised’ art world tends to easily symbolise and commoditise the value and narratives of artworks out of their original contexts. As an example, it demonstrated that some curating practices related to Korean art have been carried out within a very systematic and limited framework that codifies artworks, rather than revealing the works’ genuine narrative of difference. Although contemporary curating for the past few decades has proliferated within a highly globalised environment, this limited representation of cultural otherness has spread under the rules of professionalism and commercialism, revealing not only a simplification of artworks, but also a false representation of reality. Okwui Enwezor points out that:

In the contemporary art sphere, there were opportunities to bring and expand the discourses of representation within a new visibility of minorities,

redrawing the institutional systems. However, this healthy and vigorous environment of debate in the art world was somehow eroded by the systematic and limited view of exhibition. Despite their proliferation, international exhibitions and institutions could not define the legitimacy of contemporary art, rather, they were being caught up in the course of reshaping their own legitimacy as a consequence of the global community.²⁰⁸

Based on this argument, the research questioned how contemporary curating could develop a more valid curatorial mode beyond the logic of systematic representation in order to present new and diverse aspects of contemporary art. In this respect, the second chapter researched a few important curatorial attempts by other international curators and artists, who tested different curatorial modes to deal with various social contexts, ideas, and subject matters; for example, Catherine David's *Documenta X* and *Contemporary Arab Representations*, Okwui Enwezor's and six co-curators' *Documenta XI*, Esther Lu's Taiwan Pavilion *This is not a Taiwan Pavilion* at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 and the Cape Town based collective Chimurenga's *The Chimurenga Library* at Showroom London in 2015. With these examples, the chapter discussed recent conceptual and practical turns in curating, especially around the logic of discursiveness. These exhibitions, instead of writing a bold statement of how an exhibition should be seen, attempted to question and even dismantle what has been already known and established around the global art world, for instance, identity, culture, history and many other pre-given frames. Following this, the chapter argued that instead of pursuing any single mode of representation, curating practice should focus on opening up a communicative or discursive space, since this can reveal the diverse aspects of contemporary art.

On this basis, the research explored my own curatorial projects in the third and fourth chapters by illustrating the discursive space of an exhibition as the foreground of my projects. Also, through these chapters, I have questioned to what extent my projects challenged current knowledge of contemporary Korean art and how the projects would be evaluated in terms of enriching the narratives of contemporary art exhibitions. My curatorial projects in collaboration with Korean artists did not come up with any definitive illustration as to what contemporary Korean art is, or what it should be. The projects aimed, rather, to unveil the possible gaps within the varied dimensions of 'Korean art.' Additionally, instead of pouring cement into these gaps, I tried to create a potentially communicative space where viewers could start their own thinking and reading of the

²⁰⁸ Okwui Enwezor, 'The Black Box', pp. 42-55.

exhibits, and of the complex narratives behind them, through the process of individual negotiation with the gaps. As explored in these chapters, the notion of failure will always be involved in this discursive curating, and it might even be a destiny that the new mode of curating has to accept from the outset. This is because it seems almost impossible to develop any curatorial mode without considering the means of representation so that curating will always entail a level of misleading representation.

Nonetheless, this strategy of bringing the irreducible gaps to the fore of the projects should not be seen as a passive acceptance of the notion of failure. Rather, it was my curatorial attempt to offer a nuanced presentation of the finite nature of this capacity, with a greater possibility of diverse readings of art. For this attempt, I questioned the representative mode of curating, and provided a contextual space where a pleasurable porosity of contemporary art can be experienced. The projects were not only about the subject of Korean art, but also discussed a discursive curatorial structure beyond the notion of representation with the specificity of Korean art. Instead of writing a definitive statement of how Korean artists should be seen and presented in contemporary curating, the projects tested different curatorial modes, discussing how to open up a space where various subject matters and contexts mingled together. In this respect, the research explored some essential aspects of curatorial structure, which I believe can be applied to the broad context of geographical curating, beyond the original context of Korean art. The structure and ideas can be described and proposed as follows:

Reconsideration of a Given Condition:

My projects are attempts to challenge given categories in contemporary art and curating. The means of challenging here should be acknowledged as different from the act of negating. It is, rather, closer to shaping a reflective space that invigorates reconsideration of current categories. Therefore, it is about finding out where the current categories are rooted and cultivating a more appropriate language beyond the current categories. For instance, the term 'Korean art' was questioned in my projects. First of all, the project *Map the Korea* aimed to revisit what had already been accepted about the term 'Korean art'. In the process, the term was considered as a sort of historical object that involved a pre-given or constituted meaning. This act of revisiting the pre-given meaning of Korean art revealed today's image of Korean art and how and in what sense it is being objectified and presented. The project's ambivalent stance of accepting and erasing the term, 'Korean art', raised further questions about an older meaning of the term, as well as suggesting a more

adequate understanding of it. A similar curatorial approach to the term 'Korean art' was considered and further experimented with in the project *Penumbra: an 8-day Project with 8 Artists*. The project invited eight young Korean artists who could possibly be classified as Korean, but showed obvious differences in their choices of artistic medium, subject matter and even nationality. The project intentionally categorised them as Korean artists in order to indicate that there were different visibilities and illegitimated artistic subjectivities beyond the pre-situated image of Korean art.

Also, along with the reconsideration of the term Korean art, my projects generated a radical reconsideration of conventional exhibition making. For example, *Penumbra: an 8-day Project with 8 Artists* developed the idea of a process-based and open-ended exhibition, rather than following a managerial and descriptive mode of transactional curating. Based on a relay-like format, the project constantly shifted its shape with several displacements of a single enunciated picture of representation, in which other participants and viewers activated the displacements. Moreover, two other collaborative projects, *Richard Smith* and *Eunsoo Hur*, followed the logic of communication with close interplay between the artist and curator. Instead of setting up a separated and limited role play and following a mechanical process of conventional exhibition making, the projects were founded on the various encounters between the fictional characters invented for the projects. In the projects, both the artist and curator acted as a sort of mediator for each other, with less hierarchic formats of communication.

Dialogic Format of Exhibition:

As stated earlier, my projects were initiated with the idea that curating practice is unable to give a totalised view of the exhibits; thus, a sort of misreading and false representation of artworks will always occur in the course of curating. Based on this argument, the projects were enacted through the process of communicative exchange, shifting a curatorial praxis from the realm of representation to that of dialogue. This idea of dialogics in my practice can be seen as a more expanded, but at the same time, a more specified mode of discursive curating. It engages with the notion of abstraction and an open-ended format; one might say that it hardly articulates any point of conversation. However, it certainly provides very specific points of conversation, but without illustrating any final destination for that conversation. The projects were based on a belief that this incomplete and imperfect state of dialogue can create different paths of thoughts and narratives, unlike rational and goal-oriented conversation.

From this dialogic framework, the project *Penumbra: an 8-day Project with 8 Artists* could start developing a series of conversations with and between the participants. Through the interviews with the artists prior to the project, it was found that each artist embodied a very different singularity of contemporary art. The project tried to visualise their varied artistic subjectivities and complex narratives by combining them together and activating multiple dialogues between them. During the eight-day period, the artists were invited into a shared space and time, and had to work on and react to each other, accumulating the outcomes through the process. The final scene of the project showcased almost unimaginable differences between the artists, requiring different ways of understandings and more expanded vocabularies for the viewers. Also, the projects *Richard Smith* and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* tested this dialogical format of exhibition making. The dialogue between the artist and curator in particular played a seminal role in constructing fictional characters that propelled the projects. In the course of inventing and developing these characters, in-depth communication with the artists could occur, which allowed for discussions on various subject matters beyond the professional boundaries between the artist and curator, and which consequently gave rise to more content for the exhibitions.

Metaphor as Multiple Narratives:

The dialogical state of the projects was maintained during the whole exhibition-making process. If the initial dialogue came about with an artist, the ultimate dialogue took place with viewers through a metaphor that was originally implanted through the dialogue with the artist. Therefore, a metaphor in my projects can be considered as a place where the dialogues with viewers can start, and also where the specific context is located. Developing this idea of metaphor originated from the question of how an exhibition can present a specific context, and simultaneously, stay open to various interpretations and narratives. The right answer to this dubious question was found in constructing a metaphor, in which viewers could get an idea of what the projects were about, but at the same time, keep their distance from the initial statement and create a new reading of it.

For example, *Richard Smith* considered the project space's unusual situation of redevelopment as a primary source of creating a metaphor. The exhibition space was located inside the Heygate Estate, known as a failed utopia in South London, where all the residents had to be moved out due to the regeneration of the area. By bringing this specific

situation of gentrification into the project and presenting it through a fictional figure, the project attempted to reveal the problematic aspects of the market economy. More importantly, by taking this situation as a metaphor, the project juxtaposed the artist's personal experience of losing authorial status and making endless compromises within the problematic conditions of the global art world. Here, it can also be said that although the project was initiated from a specific context, it was not completely tied to its origins. Rather, it took on different functions in varying contexts. The project, therefore, discussed not only the socio-economic situation of the global economy, but also the problematic state of art practice, and furthermore, the situations that any individual might experience in contemporary society. As indicated, the presentation of a metaphor in my projects is essentially fragmented, unlike any definitive representation of an artwork. It is developed with specific contexts but not entirely fixed. The metaphoric elements of exhibitions explore multiple narratives, to be read and interpreted differently with a sense of belonging to the specific contexts, but staying away from the limits of their enunciation.

Viewing as a Critical Activity:

It should be noted that what the metaphor aimed to address in my projects was neither a new product nor knowledge, but its incompleteness and complexity, and to use these as triggers to stimulate the dialogue between the exhibitions and the viewers. Here, a metaphor formulated an enigmatic situation in which viewers could have a fresh and sensory viewing experience, avoiding the habitual way of looking and reading an exhibition. In my projects, this sensory act of viewing was considered as a crucial element, and this can stimulate critical aspects of the exhibitions. This viewing activity is in some sense fragmented and incomplete as a state of dialogics. For instance, *Map the Korea* was in a rather sprawling setting that illustrated a level of conflict between the artworks; similarly, *Penumbra: an 8-day Project with 8 Artists* showcased artworks that could hardly be identified as completed images. Moreover, the projects *Richard Smith* and *Eunsoo Hur: Showcase* invited viewers directly into enigmatic situations without telling them that the exhibitions were based upon fictional narratives.

In these projects, the audience has to rely on their act of viewing to write their own readings of the exhibitions and this always breaks the given narratives, and phrases new thoughts and ideas. This viewing process is stimulated by the situated metaphors, for example, linguistic error, (re)mapping practice, accumulation and collision, fiction, and some others. With the situated metaphors, viewers could experience multiple trajectories

and develop a series of individual dialogues. The dialogues might eventually end up with a misinterpretation of the exhibitions; even so, this can unfold narratives without forcing the artworks into certain frames, but inspire more serious reflection on them. The projects were based on the belief that the manifestation of abstraction and bringing a dialogic space into an exhibition can remove the given constraints and rules. And this points to the value of an abstract sense that situates the hermeneutic task for the audience. Therefore, viewers were not just spectators or disciplined objects in my projects. They were the acting subjects, where all the questions and different narratives of the exhibition were mixed together.

As has been explored, in the globalised world it is difficult to consider ourselves standing in front of the world; rather, we are already a part of the world. That is to say, we are already in the world, and thus no longer able to build up or totalise the world. Similarly, today's globalised art world suggests that contemporary art can hardly be clearly presented within any definitive sense. Art today is beyond representation. Any curating practice would not find a definitive picture of art, but can only end up with a more developed form of questioning. However, even though it never reaches any conclusive solution, I believe that curating has to keep questioning, and sharing that process of questioning. And for that questioning and sharing process, curating practice should be involved with more specified examples and languages in order not to be diluted in the global art world.

On this basis, the research, instead of proposing a single project as a definitive answer, was more focused on sharing the journey of questioning and of building a curatorial structure. In this respect, the research discussed recent curatorial turns and related concepts, especially the ones that have expanded into more discursive exhibitions with their para-curatorial frameworks. It also explored my own curatorial practices with contemporary Korean artists, arguing that a dialogical and discursive format of curating can illustrate various nuances, ideas, and narratives of the arts. Of course, the assumption that this mode of curating would lead to a better exhibition could be false, but at least it can be argued that this dialogical mode of curating allows us to reflect and rethink current conditions of contemporary art. In other words, it encourages us to remain sensitive to the current situation of contemporary art, with great sympathy and seriousness, and this will help us to expand its vocabulary.

I am aware that this research can only draw a provisional conclusion within a very limited area of art; contemporary Korean art. However, the research, instead of dealing with the limited subject of Korean art, has focused on developing a specific and concrete argument on global curating by taking real case studies of Korean artists as specificities of the global art world. The question yet remains whether this sense of specificity can be expanded, exploring not only Korean artists but also other international artists, and if so, whether it can still illustrate a specific departure of dialogic, staying flexible and also undiluted in the global art world.

With that question in mind, I plan to carry out a long-term publication project, which is similar to Chimurenga's quarterly gazette, the *Chronic*.²⁰⁹ Similar to my previous projects, this publication will address some problematic conditions of the global art world, for example, professionalism, the celebrity culture, heteronomous curating and the market logic that is driving the art world into a representational system. For the project, I will invite not just Korean artists but also other international artists, curators and writers.²¹⁰ And they will be asked to share their experiences gained from the global art world through their writings, drawings, photographs and many other printable works. It should be said that the inclusion of other internationals in the project is not for drawing a more generalised picture of the art world, but for providing more expansive and various specificities of it. Each participant will tell different stories in a very subjective manner, and they will be combined and edited to share the experience, encouraging a sense of complexity, creativity, flexibility, complaint and resistance.

This combination of different experiences and the presentation of them will illustrate some problematic aspects of the global art world. The project can be seen as developments from my previous projects, in particular, *Eunsoo Hur* and *Richard Smith*. Both projects were formed based on a series of interviews and discussions with both Korean and international artists, and presented through fictional characters, which were invented in collaboration

²⁰⁹ The project can also be linked with the publications by Okwui Enwezor and Catherine David related to their projects: *Documenta X*, *Documenta XI* and *Arab Representation*. See chapter 2.

²¹⁰ I have participated in a few research programmes, curator residencies, and seminars during my research, for example, ISCP New York Curator Residency, Gwangju Biennale Curator Course and Project Via Research Project with Performa. Due to the programmes' international setting, I was able to meet a number of international artists, curators and writers who have similar research interests. For the publication project, it would be possible to invite them and ask to share their experience and struggles.

with Korean artists, and which presented problematic aspects of the art world.²¹¹ As a more expansive and flexible project, the publication project will manoeuvre through broader aspects of the art world with specific stories of the real experiences of both Korean and international artists, articulating complex thoughts.

Through specific examples, this research revealed that the presentation of contemporary art relies on simplistic patterns of representational curating that are unable to illustrate the complexities of the art. It also argued that it is important to build and maintain a curatorial structure that creates a discursive space beyond the current representational system. Creating a new structure for artistic and curatorial production sounds always tempting, but unfortunately, it is very difficult to create anew without acknowledging the current system. On this basis, my previous projects started inside the existing system with the belief that the projects can still create a new space inside the system. The future publication project in the form of a newspaper can also be seen as a similar attempt. It would not create a new structure or medium but take current one - publication of a newspaper - in ways that could raise awareness and shape a new sensibility in a discernible way, so that it can eventually expand the current structure. It is seemingly paradoxical that the act of reflection and re-signification of the current system and its problems can open up a space for different forms of critique, but this paradox could be the place where dialogic curating starts. I believe that the medium of publication can have both organisational continuity and the agility to discuss how we engage with the present and also with the past, since it belongs to our everyday lives and has both longevity and disposability. As explored throughout the research, many contemporary artists and curators have already published various thoughts and practices, addressing the question of how current art and curatorial practices can be improved and stretched. The publication of more specificities and thoughts would also be a good step forward to developing further discussion on curating contemporary art in the global art world. In this sense, I hope the publication project and also this PhD thesis, dealing with specificities of the global art world, can share some narratives and ultimately motivate me to conduct further projects, and also motivate those who have a similar interest.

²¹¹ Although the fictional characters were invented and presented in collaboration with Korean artists, a series of interviews and conversations with both Korean and international artists were included in the projects. The interviews and conversations were documented and presented through the viva exhibition.

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