

Magda Tyzlik-Carver

**SOLAR SYSTEM AS IT
REALLY IS AND CURATING
AS/IN COMMON/S**

**APRJA Volume 2, Issue 1, 2013
ISSN 2245-7755**

CC license: 'Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike'.

Preamble

'We have to describe the solar system as it really is and not as we would like it to be' ('Pluto Loses Status as a Planet'). These words by Iwan Williams, the chairman of a panel which demoted Pluto to a status of a 'dwarf planet' in 2006, invoke so well, though most likely unintentionally, the particular kind of space that I regularly attend as a curator and researcher. As a practitioner at work, curating and researching, I find myself often at the disjuncture so neatly defined by this statement: between the apparent real and the imaginary, between what is and what I hope for. In my practice, this space of separation is between what curating is, how it is defined and practised, and what I would like it to be. I find that it is through the practice that I am able to articulate my desires, through doing it. There it is. This fluency is less present in the writing about it, however. And there I so often mask the fact that I fail, when I pretend that what I would like it to be really is.

Perhaps one reason for this is the subject of my research which proposes to understand curating in/as common/s. If the common, as Hardt and Negri say (256), is discovered and produced through joyful encounters, then perhaps writing about *curating in/as common/s* should be also done with others. And so, even as I am writing it now in the solitude of my study, with books and papers scattered around me, with multiple browser windows open, with multiple versions of this paper that I started and never finished, I will attempt to practice the joyful encounter now: an event of encountering texts, words, and people, their ideas and theories, and software and hardware too, though that reminds me that not all is full of joy.

Introduction: curating and commons

In this proposition of *curating in/as common/s* I am interested in a particular relation between curating and commons. I claim that there is a link between curating and 'commoning', that is the activity and process that produces the commons (Linebaugh, *The Magna Carta Manifesto*; Linebaugh, 'Some Principles of the Commons'; An Architektur), and that this link is based in practice. It lays in the fact that the two employ forms of organisation, a particular kind of arrangement of social and aesthetic relations, space, time, forms of behaviour, customs, and ways in which these are governed and controlled, in other words the way in which they are held in common. When we say that something is curated the understanding is that we are dealing with a collection assembled and displayed according to a curatorial vision and under curator's direction. Regardless if we are dealing with an übercurator with total control over exhibition, or if the curator's role is instrumental in delivering the museum's mission, or if indeed collaborative forms of curating or co-curating are engaged in process of curatorial production, a curator can be considered an apparatus of power, a *dispositif* in a Foucauldian sense.

A different form of organisation is invoked, however, when we refer to commons which are understood as a self-organised community shaping, managing and utilising resources through 'community control' (Shiva). As well as resources and community, the important element of the commons is the practice of commoning, those practices that constitute how shared resources are 'held' in common, what customs and laws make up the practice of making commons. In other words 'commoning' is about '(re)production

of commons' about caring for the community and its resources, and about organising (De Angelis 1; Holdren and Shukaitis 3).

In my proposition to think and to practice curating in/as common/s I want to experiment with a different form of power distribution in curating, one that is based on commons as an organising principle and where forms of governmentality and social reproduction are developed and take place in common with others.

The decision of researching curating and commons together reflects the need to critically consider the function of the so called audience/public/users in the contemporary art context, and its changing role as a relational element within its wider aesthetics and audience politics. Responding critically to ever present and notorious forms of participation in art as well as inescapable life online, in my research and practice I am experimenting with forms of constructing and organising curatorial events paying attention to the kind of participation instigated by them. The projects and events which I have so far devised even though discursive are performative and temporary in their nature. For that reason in the proposition in curating in/as common(s) I am not aiming at establishing a model for setting up commons in a digital domain. Creative Commons, Wikipedia, Peer-2-Peer Foundation or F/OSS are some of the examples of already existing models which constantly experiment with forms of community building and organising resources around it. Indeed my interest is in contributing a model or a method or a practice that can assist in forms of (re)production of commons in and through curatorial practice.

The question here is not just: what is (re)production of commons in curating, but also why should we consider it now? In order to answer this I focus on the word (re)production. There are number of references which have to be taken into consideration

here as they help define tensions that exist in the domain of creative and cultural production today. They often rest around the issue of work and every-day practices, and fuzzy distinctions between work and life, play and labour. For this paper I will concentrate on two of those references.

The first one relates to what often is considered women's work. In the book published in 1972, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James recognised how essential women's reproductive work is to reproduction of capitalist society and how it produces surplus value for capitalism. Since then the concept of social factory has been further extended to define the changing conditions of labour in post-Fordism (Lazzarato; Hardt and Negri, *Empire*; Terranova; Virno). Today, affective, immaterial, cognitive labour defines all forms of social and creative production regardless if it takes place at home, in the factory, at school, on the online social platforms such as facebook or in the gallery. We the users, participants, workers, audience, collaborators no longer leave the social factory. Yet increasingly the value of the mass participation is naturalised and its significance recognised only in the data mined and sold. This understanding of how social production contributes to production of value and how it is based on forms of exploitation of socialites and subjectivities is an elementary fact in this research and second wave feminism still contributes an apt analysis to this.

The second reference relates to the technical conditions of digital reproduction, the very core of it: namely the automation of certain elements, of certain practices. The default ability and readiness of digital content to be instantly copied, mixed, mashed, forked, shared and redistributed is an opportunity, a potential for a hack to take place. It is at the same time salvation from individualisation, and provocation in the situation of constant search for creativity as a source

of entrepreneurial realisation required in neoliberalism.

Framing curating and commons through the conditions briefly defined above focuses my attention on the practices which occur and how they might link. Thus I aim in this text to do two things: to sketch the background to my curatorial projects by mapping approaches which situate curating in relation to forms of participation in and engagement with networked technologies for creative and cultural production on Internet; to analyse my own project *common practice* in relation to such concepts as governance and governmentality.

Curating: practice and discourse

Curating is an evolving practice and one which is no longer associated exclusively with the institutional setting. Particularly since the 60s when the role of a curator has developed from that of a person responsible for a collection in a museum to an independent curator operating from the outside of the institution to produce exhibitions for galleries; to a curator as a blogger and filter feeder supported by a proliferation of online technologies (Schleiner). These multiple forms of curatorial practice which can be recognised today exist at the same time with many different characterisation of the figure of the curator: an 'übercurator' (Bickers) represented by such figures in contemporary art as Hans Ulrich Orbist, or Nicolas Bourriaud; the concept of artist-curators and curators-artists recognises the process as moving freely between the demarcation line that would traditionally distinguish curatorial and artistic practices from each other. Finally in the recent years there have been an increasing interest in the potential of curatorial practice

to dissolve 'the dependencies inside and outside the art world' or 'at least for shifting them and making them more dynamic' (Von Bismarck 101). Such a statement represents attention to the political potential of curatorial practice and to the fact that curating these days is not just about caring for collections and organising and managing exhibitions. The advancement of debates around the concept of the curatorial demonstrates the interest and the urge of some of the agents operating within the artworld to take into account the current economic, social and political changes under neoliberal and post-fordist conditions. The curatorial in this context is defined as 'embodied criticality' and 'act of smuggling' (Rogoff 1), 'a qualitative term' which operates 'in parallel with Chantall Mouffe's notion of "political"' (Lind 64–65), or a discursive practice (O'Neil) to mention only a few. Paul O'Neil defines such interests as 'the curatorial turn' arguing that predominant form of curating today is that of production of discourse. O'Neil concentrates on the critique of this trajectory in curating which is preoccupied with ones' own practice, and where exhibition is considered to be a 'contemporary form of rhetoric' and 'subjective political tool' (16). Engagement in forms of discourse production requires situating the traditional objects of curatorial practice such as exhibitions, festivals, events, in the wider context which relates art world and its institutions to globalised (art) markets as well as social, cultural and political relations. An edited collection of texts by O'Neil *Curating Subjects* is an example of a critical engagement in production of this discourse (O'Neill et al.).

The recognition of this extended environment where cultural and creative production takes place and where the inside and outside dependencies are indeed very vigorous, are articulated through such concepts as 'immaterial curating' (Krysa), 'software

curating' (Krysa, *Curating Immateriality*; Krysa, 'Software Curating'), and 'art platforms' (Goriunova). These contributions to curatorial practice and study are firmly situated within the *milieu* where art, technology, networks, labour systems characteristic to post-fordist forms of production, everyday practices and forms of creative production on Internet are always interlinked and present. In fact, following Hardt and Negri's claim that there is no outside (*Empire* 190), these practices are all part of the same system, they don't exist outside of something, and cannot be separated and divided into autonomous elements. As institutions and systems seem to be interlinked and networked we are reminded of and sometimes even experience or participate in forms and activities that attempt to detach themselves from the status quo, from how it is. Goriunova gives examples of specific networked forms which are basis for self-organised creativity. When discussing art platforms, she says that:

The strength of art platforms lies in the way they deal with immanent creative cultural forces that are at once insubsumable in their entirety and diversity to any single principle or institution and that are a foundational power in arts, economies, and politics, domains where more often than not, they may be beheaded. (10)

The online art platform is for Goriunova an alternative system of 'organisation and circulation' and 'a resource to constantly reposition art to reflexively disrupt institutional, representational, and social powers' (8). According to this view art and creative practices are not only situated in a broader context but also this position gives a particular self-awareness and immanency to the practice which can operate directly on different institutions and various fields.

If art platforms motivate and amplify the dynamics that exist in the (art)

world, immaterial and software curating (Krysa, 'Software Curating') also operate in recognition of practices and relations which ordinarily are still considered external to the art world. Immaterial curating directly references characteristic features of labour in post-Fordism, and like immaterial labour it describes a process which uses information-technologies and takes place within socio-technological networks. As immaterial labour was introduced as a critique of labour conditions in late capitalism (Lazzarato), immaterial curating should be recognised also as a critique of prevailing concepts around curating which omit the conditions, technological, social and institutional, in which curating takes place today. Immaterial curating, thus, sets up conditions for the concept of software curating. Krysa with the term software curating defines a specific way in which curating can be understood. She recognises software as a form and practice of artistic expression and how 'concept of programmability and the algorithm' are 'the organising principle of artwork (in a functional and/or technical sense)'. There are two parallels that are drawn here: Krysa links curating and programming through the concept of programmability which characterises software/artwork and is the core of practice of programming/curating; her argument in fact is that software is at the same time a tool for curating (organising, archiving, displaying), and can 'demonstrate *curating in itself*.' (Krysa, 'Experiments in Social Software Curating')

The examples put forward by Krysa and Goriunova concern technological and social changes when discussing aesthetic and creative forms of production. In that sense they directly situate themselves 'outside' (if we can still use this word) of what is traditionally thought to constitute the art world. Or to be more precise, they reposition the context in which curating and in fact any creative

and artistic activity takes place: the world at large. The two propositions are established together with projects such as runme.org ('Runme.org – Say It with Software Art!') as an example of art platform and softwareKURATOR as a curatorial software for collecting, storing, organising and viewing source code, as well as referencing other examples of creative activities which assemble together technologies, software, hardware, networks, people and institutions (Krysa, 'Experiments in Social Software Curating'; Krysa, *Curating Immateriality*; Goriunova, *Art Platforms*; Goriunova, 'Swarm Forms'; Goriunova and Shulgin). What the two propositions share is the recognition how technologies and practices associated with them directly influence and act upon recognised fields such as the art world and defined practices such as curating, and how they respond and influence back social, cultural, economic, political and technological structures.

My research and practice of curating falls within the discourse that Krysa and Goriunova contribute to, which recognises curating and creative practice as taking place in the wider domain. Partly this discourse sits within what O'Neil defines as 'the curatorial turn'. Where it differs, I would argue, is in the fact that Goriunova and Krysa's contributions include forms of culture that take place and are produced outside (sic!), somewhere on the Internet, as elements which also shape and co-produce this discourse. They break with the assumption still prevailing within the art world and curatorial discourse, that power to influence works only one way. The fact that Goriunova doesn't talk about art platforms explicitly in the context of curating helps to situate her discussion in relation to broader art rather than curating as a practice which one might argue is about reaffirming existing power relations through forms of display and reception. By considering art platform to act 'as a catalyst in the development of an

exceptionally vivid cultural or artistic current' and to be 'a deviation from the main thoroughfares of digital cultures' (*Art Platforms* 2) she introduces more progressive way to think of creative and aesthetic practices as potentiality.

Krysa's concern is similar though explicitly articulated through the question of 'how power relations, control and agency in particular are expressed in new curatorial forms that involve technological open systems' ('Software Curating' 10). I would argue, as suggested earlier, that Krysa and Goriunova participate in production of discourse which goes beyond its self-referential form on the subject of curating as critiqued by O'Neil. The production of discourse and contribution to it, in the case of the two examples, is realised through practice rather than limited to it. And that's where my curatorial and research project is situated.

Common practice: speculative intervention and experimental practice

Above I outlined the context of my research as located within an expanded curatorial field where the curatorial takes into account not just political and economic changes but also through practice directly reflects on the influence of technology on contemporary life and vice versa. The focus of this chapter is on the organisational features of the project *common practice*. *Common practice* is a speculative intervention and experimental practice of curating in the expanded field where the figure of a curator and practice of curating act together with the concept of the common/s and practice of commoning to consider forms of knowledge production and distribution.

It is worth starting with the question: what is a curator needed for in the context of commons? Indeed it can be argued that commons does not require a curator, as the care of the commons is shared and distributed across the community and practiced through customs and laws that govern the use of commons. If the figure of a curator is about forms of control and organisation that follow hierarchical distribution of knowledge/power, it is even more incompatible with the idea of commons. What kind of relation can be drawn if we consider a curator in parallel with doctors, judges, priests, etc. which Foucault described as figures 'through whom power passed and who are important in the fields of power relations' (247). And a curator is an important link in the set of power relations between art institution, its public, artists and artefacts. Is the curatorial intervention in the commons one which is geared towards executing forms of domination? Or could it be usefully applied to change the direction of power/knowledge flow? Could commons then be basis of rationality that governs the practices devised and facilitated by and through curator as the apparatus of power/knowledge?

My curatorial project *common practice* was devised as an experiment into, what I term curating in/as common/s. It was about initiating and exploring techniques/technologies/practices where the self of a curator is unimportant and where the curatorial event is a situation that alters the traditional power relations in a way that expands the possibilities for action by following the organisational logic of the commons.

When I talk about power I very much follow Foucauldian understanding in which it is defined as a set of power relations which constantly change and are contingent to the conditions in which they operate and which 'constitute their own organization' (Foucault 1998, p.92), and the distinction he makes

between power and domination. In this reading of the project I am especially interested in applying Foucault idea of governmentality, as the acceptance of how we are governed which is on the one hand concerned with the practices and techniques of governance (social and political control) and on the other of self-control/self-governance. Thomas Lemke recognises Foucault's work as characterised by two 'seemingly disparate projects': a genealogy of the state and genealogy of the subject which Foucault discusses in series of lectures, articles, interviews and in his project on the history of sexuality. But Lemke also recognises still missing and unknown subject of Foucault scholarship as that of 'the problematics of government as the greater context of his work' (Lemke 50). This analysis is useful as it points to the connection between the self and the state which Lemke defines as 'the problem of government'. My research engages with that issue but within the context of the art institution and art world, namely with the question: what forms of governmentality are exercised within curatorial project such as *common practice*, and how? If we think of a curator as a figure, an apparatus through which art institution's power as domination is exercised, can this device be used to introduce different forms of power and governmentality, than the usual distribution that channels power from top to bottom? It is within this context that *common practice* intervenes by on the one hand situating itself as curatorial project within an art institution, and on the other through the use of social and free software technologies and texts to generate more intimate forms of engagement, driven by the motivation to involve the 'self', of others and mine, in the project. Following from that the question could be formed in the following way: what forms of government (a curator) are practised here?

Common practice was a project commissioned by Arnolfini in Bristol in 2010. It

followed directly from experiments on which I collaborated earlier with Department of Reading under the name of *playing practice* and turning *language into objects*. The core for all the projects was the use of a particular reading method which activates number of technologies: wiki, Skype-based text-chat and Department of Reading Internet system, in the context of an online reading session. I came across Department of Reading some years before and participated in the early reading sessions. I was fascinated by how it supports a very discursive reading practice. My particular interest was in how the method required a direct manipulation of the technologies by participants, and in the fact that such involvement generated knowledge and affects which were localised and particular to each session. It was exactly this process and practice that I was interested in scrutinising by framing it within a curatorial context, and exploring what kind of potential it might have when employed for curating: can it reverse the flow of power knowledge, can the knowledge/power be truly created from a bottom up, rather than establishing knowledge/power of institution, curator or individual.

Common practice was proposed as reading group meetings which invited participants to engage with selected texts through the use of the DoR method. Two themes framed the sessions: meetings in June were dedicated to language and meetings in September evolved around the theme of code. During the language sessions we worked with the code poems by an Australian artist and networker mez breeze. In the 90s she developed 'mezangelle' language which is a hybrid of spoken English and code, which she used to write her codeworks. Mezangelle is based on so called portmanteau or hybrid words which create multiple layers of meanings in one word. For code sessions we worked with fragments from George Perec's *Life. A users manual, Hard Code Theatre,*

Scene II by the Unknown, and Deleuze and Guattari's Towards a Minor Literature.

The relation between code and language and their 'mechanics' were the focus of the sessions. Their importance was also in terms of their accessibility (language vs code) and commonality of practice (speaking/writing vs programming). Curatorial intervention in *common practice* was distributed through the network of people, literary texts, hardware, software, DoR methodology and realised in the practice that constituted the event. My description which accompanies the project defines it as a practice that 'embodies the curiosity to experience ways in which human and machine skills and abilities perform together'. How they are executed through language and code was another concern which was being tested through the practice. Both sessions engaged in the semiotics and semantics of language and code, as well as materiality and temporality of the session defined by the practice which is embodied and embedded. It is embodied because it requires participants to be physically present during the session for 3 hours, sitting in front of the computer screen, generously contributing their time, skills and intellectual abilities, interacting with others and with machines and texts during the session, it is also taking place in the art gallery. And it is embedded because the participant/human is one of the elements of the session together with software, hardware, texts, etc. It is also embedded more generally as a practice in line with other forms of working and organising creative activities online. Resources are produced, new and changed texts are generated, discussion is taking place in skype-chat, knowledge and experiences generated during the session are captured by its users. The value is in the forms of interaction with the texts, with the software and hardware and with each other. Recognising value produced during the actual event, as it happens

(as its happening), opens a possibility of understanding the event as a location for co-production of knowledge, and 'a materialist temporal and spatial site of co-production of the subject' (Braidotti 199).

Such an understanding of curating as common practice rather than common discourse is the core of this discussion. Curating as direct engagement and active participation in production and reproduction of culture and life, the common practice as an event in which a formation of a temporary collective subjectivity takes place. A particular moment of collective composition which is political while at the same time outside of politics.

Conclusion

By considering curating as organisational method which facilitates forms of co-production, we can situate the curator within a broader socio-technological context and establish links with commons and commoning as forms of organising. Whether contextualising, managing and organising exhibitions, or developing curatorial projects which engage technology and draw on human (audience, artists) participation my interest is in micro-techniques and practices on a micro-level which constitute curatorial projects, and their location and mobility within the context of art world and art institutions. Rethinking curating in/as common/s introduces an understanding of the practice as that of care which is at the same time shared as well as being individually practiced. The missing link, the problematics of government in this project, is articulated in this question about practice: how the care of the self can be held in common?

Works cited

- anarchitektur An Architektur. 'On the Commons: A Public Interview with Massimo De Angelis and Stavros Stavrides'. *e-flux* 17 (2010): n. pag.
- De Angelis, Massimo. 'Re(in)fusing the Commons'. *The Commoner* 11.Srping/ Summer (2006): n. pag. Web. 24 Feb. 2011.
- Bickers, Patricia. 'The Curator Also Rises'. *Men In Black Handbook of Curatorial Practice*. Ed. Christoph Tannert & Ute Tischler. Frankfurt am Main: Revolver – Archive für Aktuelle Kunst, 2004. 53–55. Print.
- Von Bismarck, Beatrice. 'Curating'. *Men In Black Handbook of Curatorial Practice*. Ed. Christoph Tannert & Ute Tischler. Frankfurt am Main: Revolver – Archive für Aktuelle Kunst, 2004. 99–101. Print.
- Braidotti, Rosi. 'Posthuman, All Too Human: Towards a New Process Ontology'. *Theory Culture Society* 23.7-8 (2006): 197–208. Web. 6 June 2010.
- Costa, Mariarosa Dalla, and Selma James. *The Power of Women & the Subversion of Community*. 3rd ed. Wages for Housework, 1975. Print.
- Foucault, Michel. *The Foucault Reader: An Introduction to Foucault's Thought*. New. Ed. Paul Rabinow. Penguin, 1991. Print.
- Goriunova, Olga. *Art Platforms and Cultural Production on the Internet*. Routledge, 2012. Print.
- . 'Swarm Forms: On Platforms and Creativity'. *Mute* magazine 2.4 (2007): n. pag. Web. 18 Apr. 2011.
- Goriunova, Olga, and Alexei Shulgin. 'From Art on Networks To Art on Platforms'. *Curating Immateriality: The Work of Curator in the Age of Network Systems*. Autonomedia, 2006. 237–265. Print.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2009. Print.
- . *Empire*. New edition. Harvard University Press, 2001. Print.
- Holdren, Nate, and Shukaitis, eds. 'Introduction'. *The Commoner* Re(in)fusing the Commons.11 (2006): 2–4. Print.
- Krysa, Joasia. *Curating Immateriality*. Autonomedia, 2006. Print.
- . 'Experiments in (Social) Software Curating: Reprogramming Curatorial Practice for Networks'. *Vague Terrain*. online journal. Sept. 2008. Web. 8 Feb. 2011.
- . 'Software Curating. The Politics of Curating In/as (an) Open System(s)'. 2008.
- Lazzarato, Mauricio. 'Immaterial Labour'. *Radical Thought in Italy*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997. 132–146. Print.
- Lemke, Thomas. 'Foucault, Governmentality, and Critique'. *Rethinking Marxism* 14.3 (2002): 49–64. Web. 13 Nov. 2012.

Lind, Maria. 'The Curatorial'. *Maria Lind: Selected Writing*. Sternberg Press, 2010. 63–66. Print.

Linebaugh, Peter. 'Some Principles of the Commons'. *Counter Punch*. 8 Jan. 2010. Web. 29 Dec. 2010.

—. *The Magna Carta Manifesto: Liberties and Commons for All*. 1st ed. University of California Press, 2008. Print.

O'Neil, Paul. 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse'. *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*. Ed. Judith Rugg & Michele Sedgwick. Intellect Books, 2008. 13–26. Print.

O'Neill, Paul et al. *Curating Subjects*. 1st ed. Ed. Paul O'Neill. Open Editions, 2007. Print.

'Pluto Loses Status as a Planet'. *BBC 24*. Aug. 2006. Web. 23 Jan. 2013.

Rogoff, Irit. "'Smuggling"—An Embodied Criticality.' (2006): n. pag. Web. 22 Jan. 2013.

'Runme.org – Say It with Software Art!' Web. 23 Jan. 2013.

Schleiner, Anne-Marie. 'Fluidities and Oppositions Among Curators, Filter Feeders, and Future Artists'. Ed. Patrick Lichty. *Intelligent Agent 3.1* (2003): n. pag. Web. 1 Aug. 2011.

Shiva, Vandana. *The Enclosure and Recovery of the Commons: Biodiversity, Indigenous Knowledge, and Intellectual Property Rights*. India: Research Foundation for Science, Technology, and Ecology, 1997. Print.

'softwareKURATOR'. Web. 23 Jan. 2013.

Terranova, Tiziana. *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age*. Pluto Press, 2004. Print.

Virno, Paolo. *A Grammar of the Multitude*. Semiotext[e], 2004. Print.