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How located can we be? About situated curatorial practices in Mediterranean Europe

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This article invites art workers to critically reassess the long-term effects of their practice on cultural and epistemological development in Europe. It addresses the capacity of curatorial practices to cultivate local epistemologies and encourages a fundamental role for these practices in deconstructing current hegemonies within the art system. The article approaches curatorial practices from positions other than North-Western European, and advocates for a situated model of curatorial practice. In doing so, it sets out to challenge existing definitions of 'the curatorial', adopting a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice, while evaluating curatorial methods in light of contemporary geopolitical developments.

Keywords: curatorial, located, situated, subaltern, Mediterranean, Europe

Introduction: The other and us

This article is drawn from practice-based research I have been undertaking since 2008, focused through a PhD by practice commenced in 2010 and completed in 2016, and deployed in my professional work as a curator of exhibitions and public engagement. Projects during this time frame set out possible developments for curatorial practice that would enable contemporary art in

Southeastern Europe to operate independently of what might be called the 'Northern hegemony' within a European context. This activity and research rethinks curatorial approaches within Mediterranean Europe. In doing so, it considers the potential for the discipline to enable the inclusion in cultural discourses of what academic and curator Irit Rogoff (2000) would call situated knowledge, a concept I propose as 'subaltern' knowledge.

This article invites curators and cultural workers more broadly to consider their responsibility to critically assess the long-term effects of their practice on cultural and epistemological development in Europe. It addresses the capacity of curatorial practices to cultivate local epistemologies and encourages a fundamental role for these practices in deconstructing the current hegemonies present in the art system. The article signals an attempt to write about curatorial practices and, thus, about the historiography of art and art making from positions other than North-Western European ones. It proposes an alternative set of methods, tools and considerations for a situated model of curatorial practice; it sets out to challenge existing definitions of 'the curatorial', adopting a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice and evaluating curatorial methods in light of recent geopolitical developments. This proposal promotes models of practice that enable effective local engagement in cultural production, thus allowing culture to flourish independently of larger hegemonies. The objective is to build a theoretical understanding of situated curatorial practices that can inform and guide alternative approaches. The article considers aspects of human geography, cultural studies, social science and European studies, combined with reflections on practical implementation and examination of the main discipline of interest: curatorial studies.

I will start with the essay *We and the Others (Russian Artists in the West), the Others and We (Western Artists in Russia),* by Slovenian art historian, curator, and writer, Igor Zabel (1997). Zabel opens by suggesting that the

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title indicates that the contemporary world is determined by the experience of 'otherness', however, the title does not refer to these 'others', but to an especial 'other': to the West, to the Western art world. He asks: why is Western art understood not just as one of several, equivalent art idioms, but as the other, so to speak? The answer might be obvious: within the global network of art, Western art seems to hold the position of a 'commanding point'; institutions, capital, market, vocabularies, concepts are based in the Western world or essentially connected to it.

Zabel wants this relationship to be understood as applicable globally. And yet, is there not a danger inherent in this model in the elision of bona fide otherness inherent *even* in the West? There is no attention applied to understanding differences between South Italy, for instance, or the South of Slovenia. To what extent do such regions remain unknown, or unseen in such a Zabelian model, somehow unintelligible and thus, actually, equally 'other' for the West?

But Zabel gives us clear structures for understanding ideas of hegemony and homogeneity within the art system and the role that the curator could play within that. What is the role of curatorial practice in this relationship and how this might be better employed to counter cultural hegemony and more effectively represent and foster a diverse European culture? The control on ways of production seems a perfect strategy to perpetuate the hegemony within the art system. Therefore, might a focus on formats, methodologies and tools assist a reconsideration of this otherness?

Apparatuses like Biennales and large-scale exhibitions have been created and promoted for the most part in what can be understood as the North rather than the West and consequently selected and used influentially by curators globally. These formats and methodologies can be seen as obstacles to the distribution and

implementation of more Eastern / Southern context-based and responsive practices, which I consider as potential positive inputs to the development of a curatorial practice based on local epistemologies.

Problems concerning the cultural and geopolitical status and identity of Southern regions have been receiving increasing attention from scholars whose efforts could be connected to what Rogoff identifies as the need for 'systems of geographical signification' to be 'rewritten by contemporary art practices' (Rogoff, 2000, p.13). This attention has issued subsequent calls for the participation of local and regional knowledge in cultural production. Professor of Sociology, Boaventura de Sousa Santos speaks in his work of the 'discomfort of the Western hegemony' and the 'exhaustion of North Europe' in which established practices become engrained, and at times, ultimately obsolete (de Sousa Santos, 2014). He identifies a need for 'South-South connections' to be made. Although de Sousa Santos is referring to Europe as the North, his argument should also be seen, I argue, as relevant to North / South regional relationships *within* Europe. A good example of how this can be done is provided by sociologist and politician Franco Cassano (1996) in his book *Il pensiero Meridiano* (Meridian Thinking). Cassano addresses Southern thought and stakes a claim for a newly formed intellectual *koine* of philo-Mediterraneits towards a more active engagement with such issues, for politics and the public at large.

Between hegemony, homogeneity and normalisation

The idea of hegemony is central to my ongoing practice-based research and curatorial strategy. Hegemony is here described as a power dynamic, applicable to places or geographies, their cultural production, knowledge, disciplines, formats and practitioners. That is to say that the idea of hegemony relates to the how, what, who, and when of the relevant epistemology.

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As Mombasa-born, Oxford University scholar, Ali Mazrui has explained in one of his essays, hegemonisation is always accompanied by homogenisation (2001). Homogenisation is applied here to an idea that cultural production responds to the Western / Northern canon and enters into standards established by the dominant system. While Mazrui associates homogenisation with the phenomenon of globalisation only, I see value for this discussion in linking this concept with the idea of normalisation.

The term hegemony has various connotations: a geopolitical and imperialist idea of domination, perpetrated by a stronger party to the detriment of a weaker one, while a cultural dynamic and monopoly in knowledge distribution exists (on both an academic and community level), as well as an internal dynamic of the art world where the mainstream dominates. This means hegemony is used to describe geopolitical relationships (North / South dynamics) as well as the tools and formats (large-scale exhibition and Biennale) employed to vindicate and sustain mainstream practices within the art field.

The first and most eminent voice on the theorising of hegemony is Antonio Gramsci, Italian writer, politician, political theorist, philosopher, sociologist, and linguist. Gramsci devoted several pages to the concept of hegemony in his book *Prison Notebooks* (1971). In his words, hegemony resides in the predominance of one social class over others. This is realised not only through political and economic control, but also through the ability of the dominant class to impose its own way of seeing the world so that those who are subordinated by it, acknowledge it as ‘common sense’. This common sense is nothing else but the natural introduction to what Gramsci called ‘cultural hegemony’. His theory of cultural hegemony describes how states use cultural institutions to maintain power in capitalist societies, not blind, of course, to the fact that non-capitalist states are wont to deploy such statecraft.

Mazrui sees a continuous and immediate correlation between homogenisation and hegemonisation. In his view, the more time passes, the more the hegemony of the centre influences people to be more and more alike across the world. In addressing this double phenomenon (hegemonisation and homogenisation) in relation to art, the aforementioned normalisation can prove a useful inclusion (2001).

Normalisation was defined in the East / West Europe context in 1999 by the Montenegrin curator Bojana Pejić (1999) and further investigated in 2006 by the Croatian collective What, How and for Whom (WHW). When Pejić used this definition in the catalogue of the 1999 exhibition *After the Wall*, she referred to the normalisation of Eastern Europe, reporting an ongoing process at that time, following what the philosopher Ales Erjavec called 'period of transition' (Erjavec, 2003, p.1), with reference to the years 1989 to 1991. Erjavec explains that while this transition was 'a stage of the journey that was also travelled by most of the countries in what was once popularly known in the West as the Communist bloc', normalisation represents a longer process, beginning in the 1920s and ending after the turn into the twentieth century when the East had been normalised and the Western horizon started to move (the premise of this research states that it moved towards the South, more specifically towards the Mediterranean basin).

The curatorial collective WHW, conscious of these dynamics, discussed the term 'normalisation' in 2006, during a project using the term as its title. In a press release distributed by e-flux, they announced:

> The term normalization connotes concepts such as standardization, conformity, and control. It is of immediate interest in connection with for instance the discussion of the *enlargement* of the EU and of the political and economic development in the Balkan

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> States. However, normalization can also be seen as a mechanism of discipline, deeply ingrained in the social structures of the Nordic countries, and a common condition governing how we as individuals are produced by the society we are part of. *What are the consequences of the social standardization promoted in connection with the enlargement of the EU, and what are the effects of the EU as a normative system?* Is normalization about eliminating difference and, in that case, what are the cultural and social implications of this? (WHW, 2006. emphasis added)

This extract from WHW's press release shows the relevance of normalisation as a key concept in research surrounding East / West cultural identities. WHW are not only addressing the concept of normalisation, but also creating a direct connection between normalisation and the effects of the actions of the European Union (EU), emphasising its influence on new European cultural production. This draws attention to the cultural effects of this long period of European normalisation.

Such awareness was perhaps not possible for Pejić's project in 1999, at the dawn of this new European era. A sharp difference is noticeable between what was stated by WHW in 2006 and what Pejić said in her text and exhibition in 1999. WHW are problematising the normalisation and evaluating it within a certain geographical context. They discuss the prospect that normalisation is not an entirely negative process. On the other hand, Pejić's opening text includes a quote by Hungarian artist and sociologist, Ákos Szilágyi which discusses the desire for normality:

> We want to be a normal country, with a normal economy, a normal political system, with a normal lifestyle. Normal—one among many. Normal—that is something comprehensible,

> something in which you do not have to believe, but which you can live. No poetry, no sacrifice, no miracles. A normal country—that is a kind of place and a kind of time where not frantic and magnificent ideas, not absurdities nor utopias nor demi-gods, crazy monsters, wise leaders, rule any longer, but rather the one and indivisible world norm does. Because to be normal is promising. Because the future belongs to the normals. S/he who is normal is accountable. S/he is taken into account. S/he can be counted upon. S/he counts. S/he can be part of the normal world order of the global financial economy, S/he can take part in it. Normals of the world unite! This is the latest—already postmodern—version of abnormality in Russia. Fiat normalis, pereat mundus! (Szilágyi, 1997, p.138)

Using this position as a starting point is a serious statement for a curatorial text: it declares this aspiration for normalisation! However, this pretence of normality can be associated with a manoeuvre to avoid the so-called ‘otherness’: if I am normal, I am like the others, and if I am like the others, I am with the others. Possibly this was a good tactic to avoid a second exclusion after the Communist-enforced one which isolated the cultural ‘East’ for a long period. In addition, through Szilágyi's text, we have the complexity of a type of cultural complicity with hegemonic pressure; the artist cedes in his desire for accountability to the structure of hegemony, and not entirely unwillingly.

Though normalisation is a term adopted in this field by curators when talking about Eastern European art development after 1989 it can be expanded to the current Mediterranean European situation.

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Subaltern

Simply by being Italian, I am Western. But I actually come from that part of Italy which has been a victim of normalisation and has always been treated as the periphery of Italy itself. Therefore, with reference to the geopolitical and social realities of my lived experience and those of the South of Italy, Igor Zabel's 'West' could be construed, from my position, as a fraught totalisation. At this juncture the term 'subaltern' might be introduced to help us see the power dynamics at work for othering within the West.

First used by Gramsci, the term subaltern is derived from his work on cultural hegemony, which identified social groups excluded from established societal structures. The subaltern is a subject or group not part of the hegemony—socially, politically, or geographically. It is the excluded, the discriminated, the conspicuous other. As the scholar and poet Louai El Habib says in his research paper 'Retracing the concept of the subaltern from Gramsci to Spivak: Historical developments and new applications' (2011), throughout the history of the subaltern concept, its definition has remained one of the most difficult to encapsulate.

El Habib's paper reaffirms Gramsci's use of the term, which he interprets in the following way,

> The subaltern classes refer fundamentally in Gramsci's words to any "low rank" person or group of people in a particular society suffering under hegemonic domination of a ruling elite class that denies them the basic rights of participation in the making of local history and culture as active individuals of the same nation (El Habib, 2012, p. 5. Emphasis added).

For Gramsci this term is more class-related: the subaltern classes have an equally multifaceted, articulated history as the hegemonic classes. The difference does not lie in the development or level of complexity, yet the latter is officially accepted and distributed. One reason this happens is related to the hidden unity that subaltern history has, together with its episodic totality: even when the subaltern breaks with the established system, they finally have to submit to the authority of the ruling group. Circumstances deny the subaltern access to the means by which they might control and manage their own representation; consequently, they lack access to the social and cultural institutions of their own state.

Although this text acknowledges the class implications inherent in this term, the core point of its argument has no connection and reference to the class-related connotation, but rather with a more geographical and situational understanding of everything that does not fall under strict class analysis but is excluded by a hegemonic force.

Academic and critic, Gayatri Spivak, in her seminal essay 'Can the subaltern speak?', reconsidered 'the problems of subalternity within new historical developments as brought by capitalistic politics of undermining revolutionary voice and divisions of labor in a globalized world'. She disapproved in the first place of Gramsci's assertion of the autonomy of the subaltern groups. Yet, Spivak adopts the notion of subaltern essentially because 'it is truly situational. Subaltern began as a description of everything that does not fall under strict class analysis. This is so, because it has no theoretical rigor' (Spivak, 1988, p.68).

An additional iteration of this conceptualisation highly relevant to this discursive context is the idea of 'subaltern cosmopolitanism', as theorised by de Sousa Santos. For the historian Ranajit Guha (1982) and Spivak (1988), the subaltern is the lower class, on the margins of society. This is also the case in the work of Gramsci, for whom

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this word is synonymous with the proletariat. In his book *Toward a New Legal Common Sense* (2002), de Sousa Santos uses the term 'subaltern cosmopolitanism' to refer to counter-hegemonic practices and the consequent struggle against neo-liberal globalisation—he uses it particularly when discussing the struggle against social exclusion.

For de Sousa Santos, interchangeable with subaltern cosmopolitanism is the term 'cosmopolitan legality', which he uses to describe a framework for equality in relation to difference and wherein the subaltern are oppressed people living at the margins of society. In this understanding, the context, time, and place determine—situation by situation—who the subaltern is. The subaltern refers not only to individuals, but can also be a place, an object, a narrative or a language. This short, yet precise, definition of subaltern cosmopolitanism, evidently suggests that to deal with the phenomenon (apropos context, place, narrative etc.) it is important to find specific practices and suitable formats to set against the conventional strategy in use for the major subjects. One premise on which I base my curatorial practice, informed by de Sousa Santos, is that the normative, Northern, exhibition format has often proven not to be the most appropriate mode by which to address subaltern geographies.

Subaltern geographies

If we imagine that the only correct curatorial option for a supposed-subaltern context is to develop the episodic, sporadic format of the exhibition, then the cultural production of these other regions of the South (and West) will never grow strong enough to develop anything other than hegemonic structures and approaches. In one way or another, the cultural production of subaltern geographies will have to submit to the authority of the ruling hegemonic production. This dynamic of normalisation denies access to the means by which cultural producers (and citizens) might control their own representation.

It is important to stress that subaltern geographies do not correspond to a homogenous entity, as we come to discuss below with Doreen Massey and others. These geographies can still, of course, include an elite, one that can incorporate the hegemonic position, while being in actuality removed from the interests of the disenfranchised culture of subaltern communities. My interest lies in the potential for non-elite communities to participate and lead in modes of cultural production in ways that are meaningful for them, and conducive to their ownership of the authoring of their cultural history.

Maybe we are too late to write a history of the arts from a Southeastern European point of view. But, perhaps we could still attempt the writing of a history of curatorial studies using Southeastern European references? Privileging South and Eastern European authors for my article, as well as making a direct connection to curatorial projects coming from Eastern Europe, are epistemological strategies core to my ongoing practice-research.

The curatorial and its how

Traditional definitions of the curatorial can be extended through a multidisciplinary understanding of curatorial practice. One that uses tools appropriated from social science, anthropology and cultural studies. Curatorial practice is already, to some extent, multidisciplinary, but the intention in my practice is to further connect geopolitical developments and curatorship; in particular, it aims for a 'located' model of curatorial practice that actively benefits the culture of host regions.

Curatorial studies is here viewed as an expanded discipline that works through art and with artists to deliver ideas to the public sphere, actively participating in the public sphere by creating opportunities for creative development. Though curatorial studies as a field covers many aspects, the curatorial practices focused upon here

address cultural identities located in both national and transnational arenas.

It is important to consider the role of curatorial practice in this relationship and, more specifically, how this might be better employed to counter cultural hegemony and more effectively represent and foster a diverse European culture. The crux of the issue is no longer *what* exactly those exhibitions and events, relating to Eastern Europe, were trying to tell us, but rather *how they were doing it*; that 'how' is what is interesting to consider currently within Mediterranean Europe. This question of *how* refers, essentially, to the curatorial strategies that form the basis of these processes of cohesion.

The importance of this 'how' is found in the fact that the most popular formats, methodologies, and tools (such as Biennales and large-scale exhibitions) have been created and promoted in the 'North' and consequently selected and used by curators globally. These formats and methodologies are framed in this text as obstacles to the distribution and implementation of more Southern, context-based and responsive practices, here considered as potential positive inputs to the development of a curatorial 'epistemology of the South' as defined by de Sousa Santos (2014).

As I have argued, large-scale international exhibitions, such as Biennales, do not necessarily have a positive effect on 'local' cultural production. In terms of European cultural development strategies, the Biennale supports the mainstream—which artist Luis Camnitzer (1987) associates with the art market and strategies of homogenising capitalism—and can be instrumentalised as a device for touristic promotion, temporarily benefiting the economic development of host regions, but not necessarily developing those regions culturally in any sustained way. The host region provides a budget, and a set of venues and facilities, and in return gains the economic privilege from international visibility. While this

can benefit the global art world, and the touristic industries of host regions, it can resolutely fail to cultivate the local cultural activity of those regions.

The reasons that the Biennale format and other large-scale exhibitions fail to enrich local cultural activity are manifold. They are often nomadic and globalised (not tailored to the locality), short-term, product-oriented (temporary exhibition-based), and they address mainstream trends and discourses in contemporary art, defined by an international group of elite artists and curators. Any acknowledgement of 'local flavour' is often cursory, utilised in the marketing of the event rather than its content, and unable, or unwilling, to reach any depth of critical engagement. The process of constructing and delivering the exhibition is accelerated, with most labour imported. The sudden influx of visitors can place a strain on local infrastructures, and any improvement made in anticipation of this is likely not the most pressing concern for the local community. After the event is over, there is little evident cultural benefit to the host regions. Therefore, I argue that the Biennale does not prove to be a sustainable model; alternative models of cultural engagement should be sought. Ideally those would allow space for participatory research, 'time for reflection' as defined by O'Neil (Morland and Amundsen, 2010, p.8–9), deep analysis and self-reflexive revising of processes and outcomes.

The dynamic at play here means that the large-scale exhibition model is perpetuated by normalised, overarching funding strategies and this, in turn, perpetuates mainstream, globalised discourses and approaches in the arts, ahead of subaltern or local epistemologies. At the same time, there exist curatorial practices which seek to constructively address and reform this trend[1].

Academic and critic, Nikos Papastergiadis and art historian, Meredith Martin discuss the wide propagation of the Biennale as an example of the proliferation of an

established Northern model, without sufficient critical reflection, and call for an epistemological enquiry that values the relevance of the local over global inclinations towards homogenisation (Papastergiadis and Martin, 2011, pp.46, 53). Curator and writer, Paul O'Neill is also critical of the growing Biennale culture, registering it as potentially a 'homogenising force' that is instrumentalised as a promotional tool for city branding (2012, pp.51–85). In parallel, Rogoff describes an 'epistemological order' of normalising force, 'that masks fundamental shifts in identity formation' and argues for a renewed urgency to 'attempt to re-write those relations so that they actually reflect contemporary conditions' (2000, p.2). These counter-normalisation principles are ones I deploy at the centre of my curatorial research and practice.

An archival approach to curatorship

A principal curatorial strategy in my practice has been the application of what we might categorise as an 'archival curatorship approach'. Inspired by what curator and critic Barbara Vanderlinden defined as 'the laboratory years' of curating (2006), under which exhibitions were made explicitly referring to previous ones, I started to make projects that would refer to previous exhibitions or publications coming from the South and East Europe. This would be one way of claiming and clarifying the relevance of Southeastern curatorial practice and its partially unwritten history.

I therefore propose through practice a set of methods and considerations for what I called a self-reflexive model of curatorial practice, intended to effectively enable the engagement of local knowledge in cultural production *against* normalisation. This proposal was reached through three stages of research: considering the political, geographical, and theoretical contexts of Southeastern Europe; evaluating the presence of local culture within existing models and identifying good practices; and, thirdly, applying and evaluating methods and frameworks

for local engagement through a series of curatorial initiatives.

Within my practice, these components are designated as the 'four elements of curatorial practice for local engagement': geography, time, process, and epistemology. These elements can be used to devise and evaluate any curatorial project that seeks to cultivate local epistemologies in cultural production and can be defined as a situated curatorial practice.

If applied in this way the curatorial can reimagine the 'epistemology of the South' in Southeastern Europe (and whichever other subaltern geopolitical domain) through refocusing upon how this epistemology is produced and promoted in the first place. The key is to re-discuss and re-describe the practice and create a more situated curatorial approach: to stimulate self-reflexivity. Important to note is that this self-reflexivity is not to be uninformed by transnational mapping points; its effective holism comes about through respect for the local, through parity of esteem, not a binary assumption that there is nothing to learn from, as it were, looking abroad. Once this shift to parity has been made, the curatorial practice will be able to engage with local knowledge through socially engaged art projects, participatory action research, long-termism, and process-oriented activities. This essay concludes with some elaboration of these four elements.

1. Geography

In their book *Locating the Producers,* O'Neill and founding director of Situation Claire Dohert explain how cultural policy documents present places as fixed entities, in the touristic rebranding of places (2011, p.3), to which art practitioners are invited to respond with what sociologist Pascal Gielen would call 'good idea(s)' (Gielen, De Bruyne & Tol 2009). Geographer Doreen Massey offers an alternative approach to conceptualising

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geographical 'space', as 'a mutable location'. Instead, she sees it as a 'living experience':

> a constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus [...] Instead, then, of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated movements in networks of social relation and understandings, but where a large proportion of those relations, experiences and understandings are constructed on a far larger scale than what we happen to define for that moment as the place itself, whether that be a street, or a region, or even a continent (Massey, 1991, p.315).

For Massey, concepts of 'places, spaces and geographies' are all fluid things in a constant state of change, always with something new to be discovered. Massey underlines the conception of space as a plurality of trajectories which coexist contemporaneously. This plurality is the essence of space: if we have no plurality, we have no space and vice versa—they are co-constitutive. Finally, Massey stands for recognition of space as a constant work in progress. Viewing space itself as the result of interrelations, it follows that it would be impossible to see these relations as static or fixed. They need to be carried forward and worked on; they are never finished.

In a series of international lectures and symposia *Rethinking Context in Contemporary Art* hosted at Situations (Bristol) since 2003, context specificity was discussed in order to challenge the orthodoxy of site-specificity. Many formats, whether large-scale exhibitions, international Biennales, public art regeneration initiatives or off-site gallery programmes, were growing increasingly place-related; this progressive attention to a sense of place started to be visible even in comparative disciplines such as human geography and contemporary archaeology. Art critic and curator, Lucy

Lippard called this the ‘genius loci’ in her book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentered Society* (1998), referring to a response to the rootlessness of modern society: it is striking that in a hyper-nomadic society, this sense of belonging to a place or context gains increasing importance and visibility within art projects.

Conceptions of geographical space are relevant to the making and understanding of public art, site-specific projects, and community projects. Space, in this sense, includes a complexity of aspects: history, politics, philosophy, social discourse, representation, community, culture, landscape etc. The space paramount for this article, of course, is the local: the site of knowledge through which culture is constructed. This concept of the local privileges the culture and ideas of a place over its materiality or physical borders. Local, here, does not only refer to the location of the ‘event’ but also to the culture it owns (this can also be understood in terms of ‘situated knowledge’ and, importantly does not preclude international crossovers and commonalities).

In his book *Spatial Aesthetics: Art, Place, and the Everyday,* Papastergiadis suggests that we should understand place as being ‘constitutive in the production of contemporary art’ and also that ‘[w]e need to develop new models for discussing art that are made from the materials that are available in the place of its encounter’ (2006, p.15). It is in response to this need that the curatorial practice I am practicing and promoting aims to develop new models of art and cultural processes that focus on local discourses, making them central to cultural processes. From this perspective, the place itself provides the raw material to work on and with. In this way, this situated curatorial practice aims to overcome what Massey sees as ‘one of the effects of modernity, the establishment of a particular [post-colonial] power / knowledge relation’ (2005, p.64). A situated curatorial practice aims to include regions and localities that would be marginalised (by design or by innate prejudice) within existing cultural frameworks.

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2. Duration and time

Considerations of the element of time depart, also, from the profile of the large-scale exhibition and Biennale based on a temporary and transitory framework. With reference to broader philosophical contemplations about the nature of time, what is at stake theoretically is the impossibility of ‘slicing up’ time. Philosophers Henri Bergson and, later, Constantin V. Boundas (1996), offer the understanding that a continuum cannot be broken up into ‘discrete instants’ or an ‘aggregate of points’. Movement cannot become static. In her text *Spatial Disruption*, Massey underlines the ‘impossibility of reducing real movement / becoming to stasis multiplied by infinity’; the impossibility of history as the result of a succession of slices (1997, p.222–223). In Massey's understanding, these slices cannot produce ‘becoming’.

The timeframe of a Biennale or large-scale exhibition can be seen as a slice, or multiple slices, interrupting the real flow of local time. Gielen explains that such cultural formations generally take place over a short period, typically between five and eighteen months for their creation, plus around three months for the public-facing event. This scarcely helps the ‘local’ to develop on a long-term basis, obliging the context, counterproductively, to accelerate and adapt in order to host a short-term, large-scale event (Gielen, 2013, p.30, 41). As a result, time does not move organically, it is being sliced and accelerated, controlled artificially by normalisation impositions.

It is not only the flow of time which is important, but the typology of it. In this regard it is interesting to consider the point of view offered by O’Neill in an interview entitled ‘The Politics of the Small Act’ (Morland and Amundsen, 2010, p.8–9). O’Neill maintains that academia allows him ‘time for reflection that the constant state of production can disable’, while his practice gives him the opportunity of operating in ‘response to immediate conditions and to local constituencies’. O’Neill emphasises the importance of two different time

conditions which are not prioritised within the exhibition-making time frame: the ‘time for reflection’ which is, I would say, a moment of deceleration, rather private and not necessarily spectacular, and the ‘local time’, a time of direct response to a certain context, a time made of urgencies and emergencies difficult to contemplate and follow through in one hundred days only.

The time proposed here is that which O’Neill and Doherty have defined as ‘durational’ (2011). They define durational as a series of ‘processes to public art curating and commissioning [which] emerged as an alternative to nomadic, itinerant and short-termist approaches in recent years’. While O’Neill and Doherty explored projects based in England, the Netherlands and Denmark, where they encountered such durational forms of practice, my research has focused on the specific case of the curatorial endeavour within the South and its epistemology not yet, perhaps, operating in a ‘durational’ way. The durational proposed in this text is an open process, at some times more loose than at others, often a cyclical time of self-reflexivity without a pre-designated endpoint.

3. Process

Process necessarily includes both the local and the durational: a continuous engagement with geography and an open-ended trajectory. This conception of process is founded on participation and collaboration, and largely experienced through dialogue.

In O’Neill's opinion, participation creates at least two relevant shifts in what we can call the production of culture. In his essay ‘Three stages in the art of public participation’ O’Neill explains how participation changes the meaning of the audience and the format when applied to a cultural project. Thanks to participation, and the engagement that comes with it, the ‘passive’ audience is turned into an active participant and the format is no longer an ‘outcome-focused’ project, but becomes, rather, an outcome, an end product in itself (2010, p.1). By

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means of the project being a participatory process based on the durational, it is, in a serious sense, already an outcome.

In the introduction to her book *Participation*, Claire Bishop (2006, pp.10–17) refers to this shift as a ‘social turn’ in which the emphasis is now placed on ‘temporal processes of engagement with people’ rather than on ‘art as product’. O’Neill sees the participants as ‘actors with their actions being part of a cumulative process of engagement with both imaginative and tangible potential’ (2010). Of course, shifting emphasis from product to temporal, relational interactions does not remove risk of ulterior motive on the part of protagonists nor, of course, funders of such a cultural shift. Participatory art strategies, as Bishop explains, can be prey to the ulterior motives of political inclinations; community art care versus robust funding of national health infrastructure; mental health palliatives versus systemic, sustainable support in the community properly funded, and so on.

Collaboration is firmly connected to participation and therefore to components of process. And dialogue is very important here. By default, collaboration requires some ability to engage with this dialogue and manage immaterial co-production. The sociologist, Scott Lash stresses the relevance of ‘inter-subjective communication’ and sees in the use of process, participation and collaboration a ‘way out of the productivist system which makes us passive receivers rather than active producers of meaning’ (1996, p.112–129). Lash supports the idea of a plural experience, in flux and shared with others, rather than an individual and immediate experience based on pure representation.

4. Epistemology

Though the ideas and references presented in this section are addressing the global North and global South, I argue that these ideas can be related to areas that would not be

described under this geo-political definition. My research registers that the South can be seen to be aligned to what Cassano (2007) calls the Mediterranean basin and Southeastern Europe, including my region of origin. The Mediterranean basin is in the words of Ian Chambers an ‘in-between’ place where the global North meets the global South in a new ‘space of flows’ (2008). So, the inclusion of the Mediterranean in de Sousa Santos's definition of the epistemology of the South would not be that far from reality.

As previously mentioned, the theories developed by de Sousa Santos account for an ‘epistemological diversity of the world’ (2012, p.43). To achieve this, the epistemologies of the South should be as much part of cultural production as the epistemologies of the North. De Sousa Santos does not argue for this is an equalising or normalising condition of dedifferentiation, rather as a claim for equality and a need for diversity. Furthermore, he calls for an acceptance of the fact that theories are situated and therefore ‘theories produced in the global North are best equipped to account for the social, political and cultural realities of the global North’ (de Sousa Santos, 2012, p.45). De Sousa Santos demonstrates in his work the need for a rebalancing of the situated South and the ‘given from the North’, and advocates for a constructive visibility and mobility across both ‘hemispheres’.

Conclusion

It goes without saying that the same would be valid for the (global) South: theories from the South would account for realities of the (global) South, which means that first and foremost there is a need to create a space in which these theories can be created, distributed, and promoted. Though in de Sousa Santos's opinion the West / Global North ‘claims the right to the dominant view of the world’ (2012, p.45) it is time for the South to re-appropriate its own view of the world. This will give the South an opportunity to better respond to ‘political needs of radical social transformation’ (2012, p.45). This ‘social

transformation' will finally end the imbalance between the North and the South.

In order to reimagine an 'epistemology of the South', or to enable the engagement of local knowledge in cultural production, these four principles (geography, time, process and epistemology) can act as headings under which methods may be considered and implemented. Each must be considered in relation to the other three, regarding both the *design* of curatorial projects, and their *evaluation*. In this way, the framework can inform and drive an iterative process of reflexive curatorial practice that is both context-responsive and self-critical.

Notes

1. For the evaluation of examples of curatorial practices from the Mediterranean region which successfully engage local cultures see also: Checchia, 2017. [↑]

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