Curare: **to care, to curate.**

A relational ethic of care in curatorial practice

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Readers are respectfully advised that this document contains the names and images of Indigenous persons who are now deceased.

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Abstract

The central question that this thesis addresses is curatorial practice as an ethical practice, a practice of care. In the field of contemporary art and curatorial studies, the connection between curating and care is predominantly considered significant only in terms of the history of the curatorial care of collections, inscribed etymologically in the word 'curator' which derives from the Latin 'cura', which means 'care'. Historical and discursive shifts in the later twentieth century have resulted in a situation where other affinities between care and curating are now almost entirely in eclipse. The thesis aims to re-establish the embeddedness of care in curatorial practice by posing the question of a specifically curatorial sense of care and responsibility for the 'other' in a relational, ethical sense. This is elaborated through two case studies, which have been selected for their relational conceptualisations, and engagement with a feminist and Indigenous/postcolonial politics of avoiding marginalisation and repression. My reading begins from the understanding that the ethical interweaves in several ways with the political and the aesthetic, as set out in Chapter One and Chapter Two.

Part One presents the first case study, the curatorial practice of Catherine de Zegher and the exhibition *Inside the Visible* (1996). Chapter Three explores the development of de Zegher's practice over the span of her career, and *Inside the Visible* through the archive, which is read for patterns of responsibility and acts of care. Chapter Four considers the exhibition as a widely-recognised feminist intervention, which may function as an instance of curatorial ethicality if it is not further subjected to contemporary repression in the literature. Part Two presents the second case study, the curatorial practice of Brenda L Croft and the co-curators of *fluent* in the Australian Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale (1997). Chapter Five maps the development of Croft's practice, and through a reading of the archive presents *fluent* as a demonstrably effective intervention into the globalised art world. In this chapter, responsibility and care are also framed broadly in relation to a specifically Indigenous conception of shared values, which is largely characterised in terms of relationality. Chapter Six considers the significance of Indigenous women's participation in Venice, and the precarity of *fluent*'s position in the recent discourse on contemporaneity. Its almost total neglect in the literature threatens the exhibition's efficacy, which against the wider repression of the relationality of Indigenous cultural practices has arguably destructive effects.

Finally, the Conclusion reflects on the research process and the way of reading developed in the thesis. Across the case studies, a distinctive ethos of care is detectable in relational practices of responsibility strategised and enacted by curators, and in their sensitivity to relationality on multiple levels. These modes of practice are argued to re-inscribe an ethical concept of care in the fabric of curatorial practice. It is hoped that the thesis presents a framework through which to read and learn from these curatorial instances of care, signalling one potential way to break the cycle of repression and marginalisation.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

AAB	Aboriginal Arts Board
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACE	Arts Council of England
AIATSIS	Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AICA	International Association of Art Critics
AGNSW	Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
AGSA	Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
AGWA	Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
AHEC	Australian Health Ethics Committee
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CentreCATH	Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History
CDZ	Catherine de Zegher
CIAF	Cairns International Art Fair
GERIS	*Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies*
HSC	Higher School Certificate
ICA	The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston
ICOM	International Council of Museums
Iniva	Institute of International Visual Arts
MA	Museums Association
MCA	Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
MFA	Master of Fine Arts
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston
MoMA	Museum of Modern Art, New York
MUDAM	Museé d'Art Moderne, Paris
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NGA	National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council

NMWA	National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington
NSW	New South Wales
NT	Northern Territory
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
QLD	Queensland
SIGs	Special Interest Groups
SF	Sibyl Fisher
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
VACB	Visual Arts/Craft Board
WA	Western Australia

Notes on terminology

Currently 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' is a preferred term. In the thesis, however, I respectfully do not use 'Torres Strait Islander' because the artists and curators in question are from mainland Australia. I also take my cue from Brenda L Croft who uses 'Indigenous'. The catalogue for the exhibition *fluent* also uses 'Indigenous' with both a capital and lower case 'i''. The specific nations, language groups or peoples to which the curators and artists belong are also referred to in their initial introduction, to situate Indigenous people culturally, as is protocol especially within Indigenous cultures. There are many hundreds of nations in Australia, so using collective terminology is not always appropriate, although sometimes it is strategic. Infrequently I use 'b/Black' in discussion of specific texts, taking my cue from the relevant writer, for example Angela Davis.

I situate key non-Indigenous curators and artists according to their cultural location when they are first introduced. With regards to situating other less-central figures and commentators by their nationality, I do not consistently do so because it seems to contravene the ethos of considering the complexities of difference and representation, however sometimes it is relevant to the discussion. Reasoning for mention of nationality therefore depends on each case.

The term 'morality' is used widely in the feminist ethics literature, particularly in the work of Margaret Urban Walker to make a distinction from ethics as the normative study of morality. To address my own field more directly, however, I opt to use its conventions rather than those of moral philosophy. Therefore, I mostly use 'ethicality' in place of 'morality' and 'ethical' in place of 'moral'.

Chapter One. Introduction

The central question that this thesis addresses is curatorial practice as an ethical practice, a practice of care.[1] Is there a specifically curatorial sense of care and responsibility? Might this extend not only to the repressed or marginalised other, but to positions and systems which do not repress, and a politics which does not marginalise? And even further still, might this also encompass the impulse to facilitate a positive, productive space in the temporary exhibition, where curatorial practice both generates sensitive and progressive knowledge about work made by artists who are traditionally marginalised, and/or sets up transformative encounters with their work?

Early on in the project, as a starting point, I began to consider the Latin root of the word 'curator', the verb '*curare*', which also means 'to care' and 'to cure' as in 'to heal'. The root '*cura*' also refers to 'sorrow', 'anxiety' and 'love'.[2] In the English-speaking world, the curator of contemporary art is so-named because historically he/she cared for a collection specific to a museum or gallery, or a historic property or heritage site, and indeed many curators continue to do this.[3] As a profession curating goes back at least as far as the eighteenth century.[4] In some languages, however, the term for 'curator' does not convey care in any sense. In Swedish, for example, the curator is known as '*intendent*', emphasising public service rather than care or custodianship. In French, '*conservateur*' is used for museum-based curator and '*commissaire*' for the person who commissions an exhibition. In Chinese, the word for curator '*guǎnzhǎng*' is 'made up from the characters for a person who plans or manages strategically the presentation of exhibitions.'[5] These definitions expose the irony of the English term 'curator' continuing to describe, in the field of contemporary art, a practice that is no longer necessarily characterised by the care of collections.

As the field of visual art changed during in the twentieth century, the importance of permanent collections in the production of narratives about art diminished. Following post-war shifts in mid-century Europe, the temporary exhibition gained prominence, for example through the five-yearly exhibition documenta (established 1955) and proliferating post-imperial biennales, to the extent that it is now widely accepted as the dominant form for the production and circulation of knowledge about contemporary art.[6]

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[1] Independent curatorial practice in the field of contemporary art, as explained below.

[2] James Morwood, ed., 'Cūra, Ae', in *Pocket Oxford Latin Dictionary: Latin-English*, 3rd Edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[3] In a religious sense, a curator is 'one who has the cure of souls' 'Curator, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/45960> [accessed 22 November 2013].

[4] 'Curator, N.'

[5] Terry Smith, *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, Perspectives in Curating (New York: Independent Curators International, 2012), I, p. 158.

[6] Reesa Greenberg, Bruce W. Ferguson and Sandy Nairne, *Thinking about Exhibitions* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996); Mary Kelly, 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism', *Screen*, 22 (1981), 41–52.

The art world has been subject to increasing 'biennalisation' where large scale recurring exhibitions dominate the forms of information and knowledge in circulation.[7] With this development came the identification of named curators, for example Harald Szeeman, director of the celebrated *Documenta V* (1972), and the 48th and 49th Venice Biennale (1999 and 2001), and Walter Zanini, curator of the 16th and 17th Bienal de São Paulo (1981 and 1983).[8] Subsequently these individuals have acquired the status of visionary curators with experimental practices in their own right, who function as precedents for contemporary curators.[9] Texts that explore curatorial work by individual *oeuvre* or practice constitute a significant part of the curatorial studies archive.[10] These offer one of the primary models for researching curatorial practice, incorporating 'first-person narrative and curator self-positioning'.[11] The directors of subsequent recurring exhibitions in the global biennale circuit have also been configured as curatorial subjects in contemporary art discourse.[12] The terms 'uber-curators' and 'jet-set *flâneurs*' are used to describe globally-mobile curators who constantly travel the world directing and attending shows and art fairs.[13] It is also now possible to speak of the individual practices of independent curators whose work calendar is not so regulated by the rhythm of the largest of the recurring large-scale exhibitions.

This thesis seeks to reconnect the practice of independent curating in the field of contemporary art with its fundamental ethos of care, although not in the traditional manner of care for objects or a collection. The etymological significance of care in contemporary curating can occasionally be detected in broad conversations about the rise of the curator. Most recently for instance, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, director of *dOCUMENTA 13*, highlighted the late curator Nick Waterlow's emphasis on passion as one central tenet of curatorial practice in a notebook entry titled *A Curator's Last Will and Testament*, considered by Terry Smith in his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012) to reveal key elements of contemporary curatorial thinking. Waterlow, Smith and Christov-Bakargiev's focus on passion and care dovetail with the Latin meanings 'anxiety' and 'love'. This is striking, but as yet there is no wider systematic analysis of the contemporary significance of 'curare'.

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[7] Biennalisation is a term used by art historian Bill Anthes, for example, to describe the rapid processes by which biennales and other recurring exhibitions have reshaped the field of contemporary art. Bill Anthes, 'Contemporary Native Artists and International Biennial Culture', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 25 (2009), 109–27 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-7458.2009.01037.x>.

[8] See an extract from Bruce Altshuler, *Biennials and Beyond - Exhibitions That Made Art History 1962-2002* on the Phaidon website that celebrates Harald Szeeman; he is said to have 're-create[d] himself as an independent exhibition maker, founding a career path that would be followed by generations of curators.' 'The Show That Made Harald Szeemann a Star | Art | Agenda', *Phaidon* <http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2013/february/08/the-show-that-made-harald-szeemann-a-star/> [accessed 22 November 2013].

[9] The effect of individualisation is compounded by the obituaries that have appeared as these curators have passed away, see for example 'Harald Szeemann', *The Independent* <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/obituaries/harald-szeemann-6151552.html> [accessed 22 November 2013].

[10] See for example Hans Ulrich Obrist, ed., *A Brief History of Curating*, Documents Series (Zurich: JRP, 2009).

[11] Paul O'Neill, 'The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse', in *Issues in Curating Contemporary Art and Performance*, ed. by Judith Rugg and Michele Sedgwick (Bristol: intellect, 2007), pp. 13–28 (p. 14).

[12] For example *Manifesta*

[13] Ralph Rugoff, 'Rules of the Game', *frieze magazine*, 1999.

Taking these observations as a starting point, my contribution to knowledge is to broaden the significance of care, and in turn expand the possibilities of curatorial practice. I aim to conceptualise and name the tug some curators feel to work *against* the repression and marginalisation of others, and concurrently *for* modes of thinking about and experiencing art that are sensitive to difference on multiple levels, prompting a repositioning or transformation of relations towards coexistence and the central instance of ethics: care for the other.

The singularity of this curatorial ethos is key. Curatorial practice has so many facets that are increasingly receiving critical attention that this ethical dimension of curating is easily lost in the 'noise' of curatorial studies.[14] This impoverishes the collective understanding of what curating has been, and what it can be. As Paul Gilroy, Professor of American and English Literature at Kings College London told an audience of young Black and Ethnic Minority curators in 2013, if young curators are to avoid consistent *déjà vu* or 'Groundhog Day,' they need a *re-opening* of questions of race and representation in curatorial practice.[15] To this we could add questions of sexual difference and cultural difference. Similarly, curator Richard Hill has argued that there is a need and a potential for critical responses to exhibitions that address these questions, so that emerging curators can work towards grounding their practice, understanding that they have a history from which to work.[16]

The difficulty lies in articulating the curatorial inclination to bring about change, when it often seems unwelcome. Gilroy for example argues that attempts to speak as though the status quo is unsatisfactory are too often dismissed as 'political correctness', because the new reality in which curators work is defined by a class politics and nominal meritocracy that is actually not all it reveals itself to be.[17] Similarly, curatorial resistance to 'othering' processes has been misread as straying from the realm of the aesthetic, making it peripheral to the real business of curating.[18] By contrast, my aim is to see where the ethical, political and aesthetic meet in curatorial practice, especially in curatorial practices located in relatively 'mainstream' institutional and discursive sites. The aim is to draw attention to, and suggest, the possibility of an ethical disposition in curatorial practice.

My purpose in articulating curating as a practice of care in this expanded, politicised sense emerges within an interdisciplinary framework. Since at least 1988, when art historian Griselda Pollock proposed the project of 'feminist interventions in the histories of art', feminist thinkers, writers and curators have been encouraged to work with both a pluralisation of, and even antagonism

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[14] with the exception of a limited amount of attention to 'curatorial ethics' in curatorial studies, which I consider in the next chapter.

[15] Paul Gilroy, 'Keynote' (presented at New Ways of Seeing: Curation, Institutions & Cultural Memory, Liverpool John Moores University, 2013).

[16] Richard Hill (presented at New Ways of Seeing: Curation, Institutions & Cultural Memory, Liverpool John Moores University, 2013).

[17] Gilroy.

[18] See for example Claire Bishop, whose discussion I return to below. 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', in *Rediscovering Aesthetics: Transdisciplinary Voices from Art History, Philosophy and Art Practice* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

between, many histories rather than a single 'story of art.'[19] Feminism has been established not as a single approach or perspective, a mere sub-genre of the discipline, but as a constantly shifting and multi-centred resource for intervening into the practice of art-making, art history and curating, and producing changes through their identifiable effects.

Within the larger field of critical histories of art and literature there have been further inflections from postcolonial studies, since at least 1978 when Edward Said posed colonialism as a system that could be analysed conceptually in order to demystify the historical and ideological processes that construct the geographical 'other' to the West. This thesis engages, therefore, with interweaving feminist and anti- and postcolonial interventions focusing on the anti-colonial politics and rich cultures of Aboriginal artists and curators in contemporary Australia, and to an extent the postcolonial intersection with cultural studies in the UK. Relationality is embedded in these discursive and cultural sites. As Gilroy has explained,

> Radical attention to a politics of location, relation and situation had been common to several earlier generations of left, green, feminist and anti-colonial critics of modern epistemology and political ontology. That spirit linked critical writing by feminist intellectuals after Beauvoir (Rich, Jordan and Haraway, for instance) to the emphasis on local scale that characterized ethnographic studies after "Writing Culture" and under the impact of broader debates about postmodern knowledge and modern epistemes.[20]

Alongside feminist and post/anti-colonial interventions in art history, curatorial and art practice, we can identify a feminist intervention in the field of ethics, asking questions of a discipline that theorises relations of the self and other through the lens of feminist attentiveness to gender, sexual and minority difference. Feminist ethics, therefore, offers tools for making sense of the ethical dimension of curatorial practice, through its critique of normative, patriarchal ethical frameworks, and via its proposals of more inclusive models that respond to difference and situatedness through relationality.[21] Feminist ethics is also the site of the emergence of care as a critical concept, although it has developed a more interdisciplinary life recently.[22]

This interdisciplinary theoretical framework unlocks a set of research questions. If curating can be understood as a feminist practice, how can it simultaneously be recast as a practice of ethics? Likewise, if curating can be understood as a practice of anti-colonial politics, constitutive of Indigenous methodologies (when the curator is Indigenous), can it also be recast as a practice of ethics? If a relational concept of care is at the core of curating as a practice of ethics, would it be possible to extrapolate it and suggest its revitalising potential for other curatorial practices that are not so inflected by feminism or anti-colonial politics?

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[19] Exemplified by E H Gombrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1950).

[20] Paul Gilroy, 'Civilisationism, Securitocracy and Racial Resignation', in *The Salon* (presented at the Johannesburg Workshop in Theory and Criticism, Johannesburg, 2009), I <http://dx.doi.org/http://jwtc.org.za/the_salon/volume_1/paul_gilroy.htm>.

[21] For example in the work of Joan Tronto, Jean Keller, Margaret Urban Walker and others, whose writing I consider in the next chapter.

[22] Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi, 'The Political Limits of "Care" in Re-Imagining Interconnection/community and an Ethical Future', *Australian Feminist Studies*, 20 (2005), 49–64.

One current trend in curatorial and art writing practice could be said to invoke a relational concept of ethicality in the practice of curating, namely relational aesthetics. In 1998, critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud published the text *Esthétique Relationelle* in French, which was translated into English in 2002. Grounding his observations in the Althusserian notion of the 'materialism of encounter', Bourriaud proposed that artistic practices of the 1990s were now so radically dependent on, and intimately mediated by historical circumstances or conditions, that it no longer made sense to speak of an object's autonomy. As a theory of form based on a critique of capitalism, relational aesthetics decoded contemporary art in opposition to capitalism's destructive effects, which included the reification of human relations in the form of commodity, and processes of alienation from labour.[23] Bourriaud redefined form as social and relational, by locating the discursive object of relational aesthetics in the encounter between individuals: 'the contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination.'[24] The relational aesthetics paradigm has implicated curatorial studies because it implicates a breakdown in traditional distinctions between curator, artist, artwork, and audience, provoking contestations.[25] In 2004, for example, art historian Claire Bishop signalled that this was not a level playing field: she suggested that one effect of the institutional promotion of relationality in art was 'often ultimately to enhance the status of the curator, who gains credit for stage-managing the overall laboratory experience.'[26] In 2006, Bishop extended her critique by articulating what she perceived as further distortions of the field, namely 'the way in which aesthetic judgments have been overtaken by ethical criteria.'[27] She wrote,

> The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism. Artists are increasingly judged by their working process—the degree to which they supply good or bad models of collaboration—and criticized for any hint of exploitation.[28]

Bishop's oppositional distinction between the aesthetic on the one hand, and the ethical/political on the other, has been criticised for reducing complexity.[29] Arguably one reductive effect has been to prevent the realisation of a relational ethic in artistic and curatorial practice.

Bourriaud's frame of reference, however, is not necessarily the last word on relational ethicality. Intertwining aesthetics and a critique of the political economy, he delimited the conceptualisation of relationality and ethicality in cultural production in a way that addressed the social level of practice. For example, subjectivity functioned relationally in the terms elaborated in Felix Guattari, in the sense that the 'fluid signifiers that make up the production of subjectivity' are

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[23] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002), pp. 8–9.

[24] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 21.

[25] See for example *Artist as Curator* (Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, London: Afterall, 2012); Alex Farquharson, 'Curator and Artist', *Art Monthly*, 270 (2003).

[26] Claire Bishop, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 2004, 51–79.

[27] Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', p. 180.

[28] Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents', p. 180.

[29] See for example Grant Kester, 'Reponse to Claire Bishop's "Another Turn"', *Artforum*, 2006.

the cultural environment, cultural consumerism and informational machinery.[30] Bourriaud stated, 'Guattari's vision of subjectivity thus provides aesthetics with an operational paradigm, which is in return legitimised by the practice of artists over the past three decades.'[31] I aim to explore relationality and subjectivity to a 'deeper' level that encompasses the psycho-symbolic, holding open a space for culturally-specific Indigenous conceptions of subjectivity. I foreground these ideas below.

In 2013, critic and curator Helena Reckitt, in her chapter 'Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics,' offered a critique of relational aesthetics and its structural absences that renewed critical focus on feminist relational practices of the 1970s and 1990s, to which we can add several others.[32] Prior to Bourriaud's publication, curator Catherine de Zegher had advanced a feminist intervention that positioned relationality in relation to elements of 'the feminine' as a symbolic dimension and positional difference in artistic practices relating to the body, to text and language, to change and movement, and to transgression and hybridity.[33] De Zegher engaged in conversation with artist and theorist Bracha L Ettinger, who was independently developing a feminist intervention in psychoanalytical aesthetics. Ettinger developed a distinctive notion of subjectivity as encounter and severality that conceptualised a different form of relationality, which she named the Matrixial. Bourriaud was aware of Ettinger's work from the early 1990s but only more recently has begun to write about her work.[34] In the early to mid-1990s, in a different context, Australian Indigenous curators Brenda L Croft and Hetti Perkins were experimenting with new curatorial forms to articulate a specifically Indigenous mode of relationality grounded in deep cultural and spiritual interconnectedness.[35] This also revealed itself in a particular notion of the feminine, not theorised in terms of gender or sexual politics, but emergent in the stories, practices and cosmic life worlds of women artists, and framed within a wider politics of survival and ethos of continuity. My research is both a contribution and an intervention into this field, with specific focus on feminist redefinitions of the concept of the ethical as offering political and aesthetic potentiality, which I extend into the field of curatorial practice.

The curatorial turn

The field of contemporary art discourse has been subject to the larger 'curatorial turn', identified by curator Paul O'Neill in 2007 in his text *The Curatorial Turn: From Practice to Discourse*.[36] O'Neill established that since the 1960s, the primary discourse about art has increasingly refocused on the space of the exhibition rather than the autonomous work of art. Recalling the work of

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[30] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 91.

[31] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 92.

[32] I examine Reckitt's text in the next chapter.

[33] For example in *Inside the Visible,* the first case study of the thesis.

[34] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Bracha Ettinger: Figures Of Out-Off (Hors)*, trans. by Joseph Mulligan (Johannesburg: University of Johannesburg, 2012).

[35] For example in *fluent,* the second case study of the thesis.

[36] O'Neill.

curator Seth Siegelaub, O'Neill stated that an early aim was to 'demystify' the conditions and 'mediating component within the formation, production and dissemination of an exhibition.'[37] By turning his attention to art historian Benjamin Buchloh's text 'Since Realism there was...' (1989) which calls for the articulation of the curatorial position as part of art discourse, O'Neill identified a key moment when curating went from being widely understood as simply 'doing,' to being 'acknowledged as part of the institutional superstructure at the level of discourse.'[38]

To speak of curating as a practice and in relation to discourse invokes the work of Michel Foucault. His intervention was to trouble the transparent or direct relationship between words and reality, and the pre-existent object beyond its formulation in discourse. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault wrote, 'the object does not await in limbo for the order that will free it and enable it to become embodied in a visible and prolix objectivity- it does not pre-exist itself... It exists under the positive conditions of a complex group of relations.'[39] Foucault established that discourse produces its object, and new discourses produce new objects. At the same time, relations within discourse are between object and expert. In the nineteenth century, for example, psychiatric discourse produced both the doctor and the patient. The curatorial turn therefore creates a discursive practice named curatorial studies, and a field of discourse, the curatorial. Its relations are primarily between the curator and 'the curated,' artists or artworks that are subject to being curated.

Foucault also intervened in the debates about authorship, problematising the concept of the author. In *What Is an Author?* (1984), he wrote that 'the coming into being of the "author" constitutes the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences.'[40] Foucault postulated that the author has a certain status in a given culture, not as a self-evident expert on a subject who exists exterior to discourse, but constructed as an effect: 'The author function is... characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.'[41] Within curatorial discourse, the author function produces the curator as an expert or author-subject.

The notion of the curator as author/*auteur* thrives, arguably privileging the curator over the artist. This tendency has been contested by Dorothee Richter and Barnaby Drabble, who wrote in the online journal *On Curating* in 2007,

> Barely a week passes without an article focusing on the figure of the curator and for the most part curating is controversially described and debated as a new and powerful form of cultural authorship, an approach that can be attributed to curating's perceived proximity to the subject-oriented ideology surrounding the idea of artistic authorship.[42]

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[37] O'Neill, p. 13.

[38] O'Neill, p. 19.

[39] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. by A M Sheridan Smith (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), p. 49.

[40] Michel Foucault, 'What Is an Author', in *The Foucault Reader* (Penguin, 1984), pp. 101–20 (p. 101).

[41] Foucault, 'What Is an Author?', p. 108.

[42] See for example, 'The Contingency of Curation. Panel 1: The Autonomous Curator', 2010 <http://www.contingencyofcuration.org/conference/> [accessed 4 August 2011].

Even when art historian Claire Bishop attempted to delineate the role of the curator from the installation artist in the 1960s context in an effort to establish their critical differences, she argued for curatorial authorship alongside artistic authorship: 'Today, when the influence of the independent critic has been supplanted by a not-so independent curator as an arbiter of taste – a semi-celebrity sought after by artists and gallerists alike – it seems ever more pressing to recognise the function of authorial autonomy.'[43]

Against this trend, there have been moves to avoid curatorial authorship and instead explore more critical possibilities for curating. For example, Richter and Drabble organised the symposium *Curating Degree Zero* (1998) which led to the travelling archive of the same name. Its central question was 'how is it possible to make material accessible and encourage curiosity, to create a debate and to call into question the traditional positions and normalizing effects of the power of display?'[44] In the publication *Thinking Contemporary Curating* (2012), art historian Terry Smith explores curating as an expanded practice that is elaborated in specific instances, setting out from the questions 'why is the substance of curatorial thinking so rarely articulated... What is *contemporary* curatorial thought?'[45] *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (2013) edited by Jean-Paul Martinon aims to 'think the activity of curating,' proposing for example that 'the curatorial is a jailbreak from pre-existing frames, a gift enabling one to see the world differently, a strategy for inventing new points of departure,' among other possibilities.[46]

Curatorial studies discourse is also driven by, and responsive to, the professionalization of curating that occurred very rapidly in the 1990s. This decade, writes Paul O'Neill, 'could be said to have begun the process of remembering [early curatorial display practices before the 'white cube' model[47]], during a moment of emergency when curatorial programmes had little material to refer to by way of discourse specific to the curatorial field.'[48] The earliest curatorial training programmes included the Independent Study Program, founded by the Whitney Museum in New York c.1967 which initially focussed on art history and museum studies, but came to incorporate exhibition practice by the 1970s.[49] Another early programme was L'École du Magasin at the Centre National d'Art Contemporain in Grenoble in 1987 which has both practical and theoretical components.[50] The Royal College of Art in London first established its MA Curating Contemporary Art in 1992, a theoretically-grounded course. In 1994 the Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College in New York

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[43] Claire Bishop, 'What Is a Curator?', *Idea: Arte + Societate*, 2007.

[44] Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter, 'Background to the Archive', *Curating Degree Zero Archive*, 2003 <http://www.curatingdegreezero.org/archive.html>.

[45] Smith, T, p. 17.

[46] Jean-Paul Martinon, *The Curatorial: A Philosophy of Curating* (I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. 4.

[47] Brian O'Doherty first demystified the neutral space of the art gallery in 1976 in Artforum, see Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, Expanded ed (Berkeley, Calif. ; London: University of California Press, 1999).

[48] O'Neill, p. 26.

[49] Frederick G. Ortner, 'Whitney Museum of American Art: Independent Study Program', *Art Journal*, 37 (1978), 225 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/776134>.

[50] Andrea Bellini, 'Curatorial Schools', *Flash Art*, 250 (2006).

initiated their MA programme which is broadly interdisciplinary.[51] In the same year, according to Andrea Bellini, editor of *Flash Art,* the critical moment in the brief history of curatorial schools came when Saskia Bos established the De Appel Curatorial Training Programme in Amsterdam: 'The course was posited from the outset as an innovation: little time is dedicated to theory and a priority is placed on the practical aspects of curating.'[52] The MFA in curating at Goldsmiths was set up in 1995. It trains students in theoretical analysis but becomes more self-directed.[53] The Goldsmiths PhD programme Curatorial/Knowledge, founded in 2006 by Irit Rogoff and Jean Paul Martinon, was the first formal doctoral-level curatorial studies programme, aimed specifically at curators. The Royal College of Art's first PhD was awarded in 2010 under the direction of Mark Nash. Since these first courses, more and more programmes in curatorial studies have been established across the spectrum of universities in the UK.

Related academic courses in museum and gallery studies are also growing in prevalence and are offered in different kinds of universities in the UK as well. Their remit extends beyond contemporary curating to practices of collecting, the art market, conservation, policy, museum and galleries as institutions, museum and gallery education and programming, as well as the fields of heritage, historic properties and so on, with strong ties to the related fields of visitor studies, country house studies, architectural history and heritage studies. Museum and gallery studies programmes also tend to focus on the contemporary in relation to the depth of history, often looking to the long histories of museums and related sites and practices, rather than curatorial studies which is almost exclusively concerned with the twentieth century and the contemporary.

Parallel to the rise of curatorial studies programmes in the mid-1990s, several key texts were published that made sense of the changing field. The major publication *Thinking About Exhibitions* (1996), edited by art historian Reesa Greenberg, curator Bruce W Ferguson and museum director Sandy Nairne, reframed exhibitions as the single most important form for art's circulation and dissemination in contemporary culture. In the introduction they wrote,

> Exhibitions have become *the* medium through which most art becomes known. Not only have the number and range increased dramatically in recent years but museums and galleries such as the Tate in London and the Whitney in New York now display their permanent collections as a series of exhibitions. Exhibitions are the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, where signification is constructed, maintained and occasionally deconstructed. Part spectacle, part socio-historical event, part structuring device, exhibitions—especially exhibitions of contemporary art—establish and administer the cultural meanings of art.[54]

The most recent of these important developments have taken place since I began my PhD research in 2009. The timing has been useful in expanding my own conceptualisation, which as a consequence aims to respond closely to current research and thinking as it enters the public domain.

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[51] Center for Curatorial Studies at Bard College, 'Program Overview', 2013
       <http://www.bard.edu/ccs/study/program-overview/>.
[52] Bellini.
[53] Bellini.
[54] Greenberg, Ferguson and Nairne, p. 2.

An early event of great significance was the *Rotterdam Dialogues Symposium: The Curators* (2009) at Witte de With, Rotterdam. The concept of curators in dialogue rather than issuing authoritative statements was formative for my writing. In the keynote talk titled 'The Implicated', theorist and curator Irit Rogoff proposed a way of thinking about curators as 'always already implicated in the narrative that unfolds around us.'[55] Although not a directly ethical conceptualisation, Rogoff suggested a notion of curating as a practice embedded in the world rather than always inhabiting a position of reacting to it.

Several journals that focus on curating have appeared in recent years, often featuring contributions by curators. This is important, because as Terry Smith points out, so few curators are willing to 'record the results of their labors.'[56] For example, the online journal *On Curating*, founded by Dorothee Richter in collaboration with others in 2008 was set up as a space of experimentation and critical reflection by curators with diverse positions and experiences.[57] In 2003, *Manifesta Journal* was initiated by the Manifesta Foundation. It presents a changing model and 'aims to be both self-reflective and critical toward international curating and biennials in general, but also toward its own functional mechanisms.'[58] In 2012, Intellect Publishing produced the first volume of the *Journal of Curatorial Studies* which has opened up an academic site of inquiry into curatorial practice that 'explores the cultural functioning of curating and its relation to exhibitions, institutions, audiences, aesthetics and display culture.'[59]

Various dissenting voices resist the concept of the curator, most notably Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, Artistic Director of *dOCUMENTA 13*. In conversation with Terry Smith in 2013, she explained her 'allergy towards curatorial discourse', and 'to any sort of discourse that would be there to define the field... [I am the kind of] reticent curator who says, "It's all in the exhibition, don't talk about it, don't do congresses or conferences about curatorial practice because you can only do it, you cannot speak about it."'[60] For Christov-Bakargiev this 'unspeakability' is crucial, 'in the advanced digital age of cognitive capitalism and financial capitalism which is all based on the verbal... Now the production and the producer of power is the verbal [rather than the image].'[61] As a critical ethos this is very significant, because it preserves a space for ways of thinking, even a set of ethical responsibilities to the possibilities and realities of 'curating' that are not reducible to language. This

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[55] Irit Rogoff, 'The Implicated', in *Keynote Address* (presented at the The Curators, Rotterdam: Witte de With, 2009).

[56] Smith, I, p. 193.

[57] Dorothee Richter in cooperation with Maren Brauner, Johanna Franco Bernet, Barnaby Drabble, Irene Grillo, Petra Haider, Damian Jurt, Christoph Kern, Wolf Schmelter, Thomas Zacharias. Dorothee Richter, ed., *On Curating*, 1: Thirty-one Positions on Curating (n.date).

[58] 'About', *Writing Feminist Art Histories* <http://writingfeministarthistory.wordpress.com/about/> [accessed 18 September 2013].

[59] 'Journal of Curatorial Studies', *intellect: publishers of original thinking*, 2013 <http://www.intellectbooks.co.uk/journals/view-Journal,id=205/>.

[60] 'Terry Smith and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev' (The New Museum, New York, 2012) <http://artonair.org/show/terry-smith-carolyn-christov-bakargiev>.

[61] 'Terry Smith and Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev'.

thesis does not take the same critical route, because it aims to inflect normative notions of curatorial practice by articulating the ethicality of less visible curatorial practices. This remit is perhaps compatible with Christov-Bakargiev's ethos, however, because it also inscribes a certain kind of resistance to homogenisation and commoditisation.[62]

Alongside curatorial practice, exhibitions are receiving critical attention in their own right, shifting away from the subjectivity of curators as the focus of curatorial studies and to an extent challenging its author function. Several key initiatives have begun to delineate and fill the absences in the archive. The *Exhibition Histories* project was launched in 2010 by *afterall* journal in partnership with the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, with the support of Arts Council England and MUDAM, Luxembourg:

> *Exhibition Histories* focuses on exhibitions of contemporary art from the past fifty years that have changed the way art is seen and made. Each title in the series addresses a different theme in the history of curatorial practice, with specific reference to a particular exhibition or cluster of exhibitions. Each book includes newly commissioned essays and interviews, key texts from the time (such as reviews) and comprehensive visual documentation.[63]

This project approaches an archival gap also identified by Director of the Program in Museum Studies at New York University, Bruce Altshuler, who has authored two important publications in the field of exhibition histories: *Salon to Biennial: Exhibitions That Made Art History, Volume I: 1863-1959* and *Biennials and Beyond: Exhibitions That Made Art History Volume II: 1962-2002*. Like Paul O'Neill, Altshuler argues that the creation of academic programmes of study in curatorial practice, along with the increasingly social and institutional interests of art history, have necessitated historical cases to study.[64] To this we might add Terry Smith's comment that,

> There has been a boomlet in attention to the history of exhibitions for the obvious reason that they have become, since the 1990s, the major interface between art's primary producers, disseminators, and interpreters and its continually growing and increasingly diverse crowd of consumers.[65]

Given the rapid shifts in the art world to embrace the temporary exhibition, the sheer volume of exhibitions can be difficult to make sense of. In 2010-11, Altshuler wrote in his article 'A Canon of Exhibitions',

> Despite the association of the idea of the canonical with much-critiqued traditional art history, and no matter how committed one is to a critical standpoint, a canon of exhibitions is not something that we can, or should, avoid... [I]t is important to establish a body of examples around which the field can be organized and to which practitioners respond.'[66]

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[62] In a different vein, explored below, Angela Dimitrakaki has contested the dominance and self-authorising power of curatorial practice in the neo-liberal spectacle of global exhibitions in her conference paper 'Tactics in Search of a Strategy?: Feminist Politics, the Curatorial Field and Contemporary Art' at NORDIK Conference for Art History, University of Stockholm, 2012.

[63] Afterall, 'Exhibition Histories Series', 2013 <http://www.afterall.org/books/exhibition.histories/exhibition-histories>.

[64] Bruce Altshuler, 'A Canon of Exhibitions', *Manifesta Journal*, 11 (2010), 5–12 (p. 5).

[65] Smith, I, p. 188.

[66] Altshuler, p. 11.

Altshuler argues that the benefits of a solidly-researched canon of exhibitions outweigh the problems. However others are more attentive to the ambivalence of the effects of the exhibition form taking centre-stage. In 2013, key events that critically reflected on this impulse and the historical formation of 'the exhibition' have included the symposium *The Exhibition and its Histories* at the University of Edinburgh which aimed 'to engage in an increasingly urgent examination both of the implications of a privileging of the exhibition within art and art history, and of its characteristics, its politics and its histories.'[67] A major conference is planned in Paris for the end of 2013 as the culmination of the project *History of Exhibitions in 20th Century*, initiated in 2011 by the University of Paris 8 and by the Centre Pompidou, which 'seeks to provide a critical and interdisciplinary reflection on the phenomenon of exhibitions in our time.'[68]

My research project is informed by this relatively new attention to exhibition histories.[69] Altshuler correctly identifies the value of compiling archival material around certain key exhibitions, and making them available through publication or other formats. The impulse to construct a canon is more problematic because the logic of exclusion is deeply incompatible with feminist or ethical strategies. The term 'canon' means 'a standard of judgement or authority,' which always imply a hierarchy.[70] Griselda Pollock established eleven years before Altshuler's text that 'the question of a single standard of absolute, transhistorical artistic value embodied in the outstanding, exemplary, representative yet universalistic artist has presented major historiographical and theoretical problems.'[71] Yet Altshuler's analysis glosses over this discursive fact of canon-formation. This is not to deny that some exhibitions are still important or significant; a *lingua franca* may be an effective way of organising knowledge, but any specifically canonising impulse is fraught with problems of power and structural exclusion. On this basis, I have designed my research project to respond to the respective curatorial practices of Catherine de Zegher and Brenda L Croft not just through biographical or career-oriented models that privilege the individual. I focus on exhibitions because they also enable in-depth analysis of curatorial practice and a curatorial ethics of care, but they are never presented as a canon in any sense, or as the absolute solution or model for any problematic, especially not feminist or anti-colonial practice that is concerned to address the politics of difference and questions of marginalisation, repression and transformation.

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[67] Diana Baldon and others, 'The Exhibition and Its Histories', 2013 <http://www.exhibitionhistories.com/>.

[68] 'Call for Papers - Labex Arts H2H - History of Exhibitions in 20th Century' <http://www.labex-arts-h2h.fr/call-for-papers-the-digital.html> [accessed 16 September 2013].

[69] More specifically temporary exhibitions of art in the twentieth century, as opposed to the discourse on world exhibitions and expositions.

[70] 'Canon, n.1', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/27148> [accessed 22 November 2013].

[71] Griselda Pollock, *Differencing the Canon* (Routledge, 1999), p. xiii.

Feminist interventions in the histories of art

In 1971, in the major text, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' art historian Linda Nochlin argued that it is not women's lack of ability or any natural cause that prevents their being named among the great artists. The problem, she argued, is the terms of the question itself. She questioned instead 'to what extent our consciousness of how things are in the world has been conditioned—and often falsified—by the way the most important questions are posed.'[72] The art historical tropes of 'Genius' and 'Talent,' and excessive emphasis on the individual artist in the form of the monograph, stress the 'apparently miraculous, non-determined, and asocial nature of artistic achievement.'[73] These ideological conditions produce and support the inherently masculine myth of the 'great artist,' which by definition excludes women. Nochlin called for a structural overhaul of art history:

> It is the engaged feminist intellect... that can pierce through the cultural-ideological limitations of the time and its specific "professionalism" to reveal biases and inadequacies not merely in regard to the question of women, but in the very way of formulating of the crucial questions of the discipline of the whole.[74]

The professional academic discipline can be named 'art history,' and the historical material that makes up the field it studies, 'the history of art.'[75] Parker and Pollock wrote in 1981,

> The way the history of art has been studied and evaluated is not the exercise of neutral "objective" scholarship, but an ideological practice. It is a particular way of seeing and interpreting in which the beliefs and assumptions of art historians, unconsciously reproducing the ideologies of our society, shape and limit the very picture of the history of art presented to us by art history.[76]

Following Nochlin, Parker and Pollock's reconceptualisation of art history and its field of study counteracted the misconception that the substantial silence on women's art practice must reflect their actual absence in the cultural scene, and that art historians write about these and other truths from a privileged distance. Instead, by acknowledging extensive feminist research that by the 1980s had uncovered a vast diversity of women's art practice in history, a contradiction could now be recognised whereby women's creativity and activity had been formative, rich and vital in its time, but in the twentieth century had been effaced. This writing out of history had not occurred accidentally by oversight or even necessarily because of individual art historians' bias or prejudices, but because 'art history's methods and categories constitute a particular and ideological reconstitution of the history of art.'[77]

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[72] Linda Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', in *Art and Sexual Politics*, ed. by Elizabeth Baker and Thomas B Hess (London: Collier Macmillan, 1973), pp. 143–79 (p. 150).

[73] Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', p. 150.

[74] Nochlin, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', p. 146.

[75] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. xvii.

[76] Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, pp. xvii–xviii.

[77] Parker and Pollock, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, p. xviii.

In Parker and Pollock's definition, art history is established as a practice, situated and determined by particular conditions and in relation to social and cultural institutions, and productive of cultural texts that can be read not just as a self-evident reflection of the art historian or artist in question, but also delimited by power structures and ideology that take particular shape in different times and places in history. Art historians, reconfigured as located subjects, vested in the history of art and its cultural and discursive contours, can be seen to be shaped by these formations as much as they contribute actively to their shaping, alongside other practitioners including artists, theorists, critics and exhibition organisers/curators.

Since initial developments in the 1970s in the West, feminist activity in this dynamic field of art has expanded and diversified. Without over-emphasising the possible historiographical differences that can be seen to delineate strands of feminist inquiry into art, as has happened in the past with unhelpful outcomes, I feel it is necessary to raise the issue of my own position and viewpoint.[78] The field has been conceptualised and historicized in multiple ways, and its telling is always subject to partialities and investments. On the one hand, I have studied Griselda Pollock's writing and theoretical milieu for seven years now as a student at the University of Leeds, so it is perhaps inevitable that this exposure has been formative. On the other hand, Pollock and her colleagues have for over forty years produced particular theorisations of feminist activity that have problematised and clarified the relationship between art and feminism in foundational ways. This is not to negate other key figures, but to ground the major relevant developments and theoretical concepts in the discourse as I, and many others, see it.

Artist Mary Kelly, at the conference *Art and Politics* in 1977, stated that the term 'feminist art' invokes 'essences' which are 'unified, non-contradictory and exclusive,' grounded in a homogenous notion of ideology.[79] Instead, she posed the concept of a 'feminist problematic' in art which draws on the Althusserian notion of the ideological as 'a non-unitary complex of social practices and systems of representation that have political consequences.'[80] In Pollock's essay 'Feminism and Modernism' in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985,* edited and introduced by Rozsika Parker and Pollock in 1987, Pollock explained that Kelly's theorisation of a feminist problematic emerges,

> In relation to an understanding of the ways in which it can be effective – not by expressing some singular and personal set of ideas or experiences but by calculated interventions... [These]

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[78] Referring to the dominance of some perspectives in the literature over others, art historian Marsha Meskimmon suggested in 2007 that the effect 'has been to produce an unmarked normative mainstream, obscuring internal diversity while mapping the rest of the world in terms of its own definitions of progress.' She wrote that the details of the debates do not need to be rehearsed, because even critical accounts end in deadlock, 'precisely because they do not go far enough in their attempts to locate [...] authority as an effect of intellectual and geopolitical domination. Marsha Meskimmon, 'Chronology through Cartography: Mapping 1970s Feminist Art Globally', in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007), pp. 322–35 (p. 326).

[79] Mary Kelly, 'On Sexual Politics and Art', in *Art and Politics*, ed. by B Taylor (Winchester: Winchester School of Art, 1980), pp. 66–75.

[80] Louis Althusser, 'Glossary', in *Pour Marx*, trans. by Ben Brewster and Lane Lane, 1969, p. 253.

occur in the context of established institutions and discourses which circulate the dominant definitions and accepted limits of what is ratified as art and how it should be consumed.[81]

Many feminist art historians use the term 'feminist art,'[82] but for me, Kelly's theorisation of a feminist problematic in art reinforces the notion of a practice connected to, but not entirely dependent on the identity, biography and intentions of artists. A feminist problematic also circumvents the problem of universality. 'Feminist art' suggests a category in which a work's feminist content, history or political priorities self-evidently present themselves, which cross-culturally for example in Indigenous contexts may not always be appropriate or accurate.

In *Framing Feminism,* Parker and Pollock also theorised feminist strategies and effects, which are now widely used in the discourse on feminisms and curating. Moving away from the traditional modernist/bourgeois paradigm of art-making as self-expression, where the intentions of an artist are transmitted unchanged through the art object,[83] Pollock wrote about 'tactical activities and strategically developed practices of representation which represent the world for a radically different order of knowledge of it.'[84]

> It is not, therefore, the fact that activities or representations are undertaken by *women* which renders them feminist. Their feminism is crucially a matter of *effect*... [The work] has a political effect as a feminist intervention according to the ways the work acts upon, makes demands of, and produces positions for its viewers.'[85]

Pollock's notion of 'feminist interventions in the histories of art' configures feminist practice as a plurality of different contributions and challenges to the field of art, that cannot be reduced to a single mode or project, but that performatively displace repressive power structures and systems through transformation and repositioning. The question of how to locate the significance of women and difference without unifying and essentialising is key to this concept, especially as Western feminism has since at least the 1980s been challenged for its white middle class status, and lack of responsiveness to b/Black and Asian women, Indigenous women, and other women put in marginal positions because of cultural, class and sexual difference.[86]

In response to these and other transformative encounters, in *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (1996), Pollock wrote that aligning difference and art made by women always seems to invoke essentialism or the paradox that art by women is in fact not really art at all.[87] Instead she drew on feminist theory to show that difference is not singular, but key to

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[81] Griselda Pollock, 'Feminism and Modernism', in *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985*, ed. by Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock (London: Pandora Press, 1987), p. 81.

[82] For example Marsha Meskimmon, see her contribution to the *WACK!* catalogue.

[83] Pollock, 'Feminism and Modernism', p. 92.

[84] Pollock, 'Feminism and Modernism', p. 81.

[85] Pollock, 'Feminism and Modernism', p. 93.

[86] See for example Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Introduction: Talkin' the Talk', in *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and White Feminism* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2000), pp. xv–xxv.

[87] Griselda Pollock, ed., *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), p. xiv.

everyone's experience of class, gender, sexuality and so on, which are in turn 'mediated by the forms of representation available in the culture.'[88] Because women's relationship to the dominant culture is therefore one of 'a kind of internal exile,' Pollock wrote, 'the artistic practices of women require deciphering.'[89] The compilation offered readings of women's artistic practices on the grounds of generation, which 'refers us to history and questions of difference posed by historical specificity around femininity, feminism, sexuality and representation,' and geographies, 'a spatial image that implies issues of cultural difference and the specificity of location which is cultural and social as well as political.'[90]

For me this offers a very clear model for inquiry that is attentive to difference operating in several interrelated modes, which partly informs my methodological approach to each case study. *Generations and Geographies* also has a particular historical connection with my first case study on Catherine de Zegher and *Inside the Visible.* Both occurred in the same year, 1996, revealing a moment of crossover between projects.[91] De Zegher's essay in *Generations and Geographies,* 'Cecilia Vicuña's *Ouvrage*: knot a not, notes as knots,' also appears in the *Inside the Visible* catalogue, while Pollock's opening essay has many resonances with the positions of *Inside the Visible,* especially the elaboration of difference outlined above, in which de Zegher wrote, 'difference is far more entangled and complex than we like to admit.'[92]

Feminist interventions in art's histories meet the second case study on Brenda L Croft and *fluent* in a different way. For a long time in Australia, the discipline of art history was unresponsive to Indigenous artistic practices because it was so invested in modernism defined against but still in relation to Europe.[93] Radical shifts in thinking following the international upheaval of 1968 demystified the ideological parameters and nationalist parameters of modernism, meeting and inflecting changes in Australian cultural politics to produce new historical and theoretical conditions for Aboriginal cultural production to be countered as 'art' by art historians, in many ways renewing art history.[94] At the same time the women's movement and feminist activity also redefined the contours of cultural politics and social relations in Australia in the 1970s and 1980s, prompting a paradigm shift in art history as well.[95] For multiple reasons, however, these two transformed frameworks for art historical inquiry have not met one another in any expanded sense. On the one hand, self-identified feminist theoretical communities in Australia have been largely unresponsive to

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[88] Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, p. xv.

[89] Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, p. xv.

[90] Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, p. xii.

[91] Towards the end of the Introduction I discuss the significance of the book's multi-levelled conceptualisation of difference and relationality.

[92] Catherine de Zegher, ed., *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of 20th Century Art In, Of, and from the Feminine* (Cambridge, Mass: The MIT Press, 1996), p. 20.

[93] Ian McLean, ed., 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', in *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art: Writings on Aboriginal Contemporary Art* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2011), pp. 17–75.

[94] See McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World'.

[95] J. Peers, 'Women Artists as Drivers of Early Art Historical Activities and Alternative Art Historical Narratives in Australia', *Journal of Art Historiography*, 4 (2011), 1–18.

Indigenous women, and on the other, the imperative for Indigenous women has been to represent their own interests on their own terms, because socio-political changes following 1968 also nourished the emergence of Indigenous women's historical agency.[96] Much feminist activity in the Australian art world does not have a focus on Indigenous women,[97] although some white women curators have collaborated with Aboriginal women curators with a knock-on effect for art historical discourse. For example, Victoria Lynn played a curatorial role in *fluent,* among others who have championed Aboriginal contemporary art with a focus on women's practices.[98]

The critical state of feminist interventions in art's histories, as predominantly articulated in my own postcolonial British theoretical context (marked by the key discursive developments outlined above), offer rich possibilities for building an analysis of *fluent* and articulating the ethical dimension of Brenda L Croft's curatorial practice. I am only able to say this on two conditions however. Firstly that my own position as a white Australian woman working in Britain is subject to recognition, delimitation and decentring not just in abstract, hypothetical terms but in my actual living practice as a researcher who works with other people and their work. Secondly that feminist interventions coming from Britain, however inflected by postcolonial and anti-racist interventions already, must also be subject to inflection by a specifically Indigenous and anti-colonial politics as well, to actively work against possible marginalising/centralising processes. Moreover, Indigenous cultural practices and theorisations present imaginative possibilities for feminist interventions in their own right. This puts ethics and care into practice not just at the level of what is being researched, but in the way the analysis is designed, structured and realised, which I expand in the next chapter.

Feminism and curating

Feminism has traversed curating in a number of ways, provoking different taxonomies of the field by art historians and curators attempting to make sense of the changing field. These accounts offer interruptions and insights into the discourse and practice of curating, differentiating the homogeneity emergent in curatorial studies.[99] In 2006, *n.paradoxa* journal editor Katy Deepwell traced the development of feminism in curatorial practice in her text 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices.' She tracked feminist exhibitions back to the 1970s when their emergence was 'clearly located within feminist art history as a distinct area within and contesting the discipline of art history... equally shaped by the political women's movement in Europe and America.'[100] These exhibitions tied into the feminist art historical project which asked,

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[96] The year earlier, 1967, is also a watershed because it was the year Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders won citizenship.

[97] See for example Australian feminist art activity listed at
http://www.ktpress.co.uk/books_country_search.asp?country=Australia

[98] Brenda L Croft, 'How Did Aborigines Invent the Idea of Contemporary Art?', *Artlink*, 32 (2012), 111–13.

[99] See for example Bruce Altshuler's call for canons of exhibitions without heed to their destructive effects.

[100] For more detail see Katy Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices', in *New Museum Theory and Practice*, ed. by Janet Marstine (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 64–84 (p. 68).

Did women artists have a different history from their male counterparts? What was their contribution to the direction of culture and art as a whole? Was it the discourses of art history which led to their marginalization, or was it the type of work which women produced? What determined the type of work women artists produced?[101]

As methods and agendas in 'feminist art history' and theory changed, Deepwell argued, 'the definition of what is feminist in the curation of women artists' work' changed too. 'Some of the earliest feminist art historical exhibitions,' for example, which were 'sweeping chronological surveys of women artists' work,' she observed, revealed the need for more research, and new forms of analysis.[102] In 2006, Deepwell offered a predominantly linear history of feminist curatorial practices that was sparked off by the women's movement in the West, and feminist (interventions in) art history in the 1970s. Her account registered however the different histories of women's work outside of the Western Eurocentric framework when she turned her attention to *Inside the Visible,* which she allowed to inflect her historical overview by turning to other postcolonial and culturally-reflexive ways for thinking about history, especially women's practices in the twentieth century.[103] She importantly highlighted that women artists and feminist art historians must negotiate their relationship to models of modernist internationalism, questioning the mapping of feminist curation as borne of Britain/European countries and the USA, and emanating outwards.[104]

In the mid-late 2000s, the question of where feminism meets curating was subject to intense upheaval: a series of major exhibitions reflecting on the intersection of art and feminism were staged in quick succession in several countries. These included *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (2007) curated by Connie Butler at the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles, USA; *Global Feminisms* (2007), curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin to celebrate the opening of the Elizabeth A Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, New York, USA; *Kiss Kiss Bang Bang: 45 years of Art and Feminism* (2007) curated by Xabier Arakistain at the Bilbao Fine Arts Museum, Bilbao, the Basque Country, Spain*; rebelle: Art and Feminism 1969-2009* (2009), curated by Mirjam Westen at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Arnhem, Netherlands*; Konstfeminism* (2006-7), curated by Anna Livion at multiple sites in Sweden*; and Gender Check: Femininity and Masculinity in the Art of Eastern Europe* (2010-11), curated by Bojana Pejić at the Museum of Modern Art (MUMOK), Vienna, Austria and Zachęta Gallery, Warsaw, Poland.[105] In the Australian context, there is currently a call for projects for *The National Feminist Art Exhibition* (2015), originally proposed by art historian and theorist Catriona Moore and artist Kelly Doley in

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[101] Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices', p. 68.

[102] Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices', p. 69.

[103] I return to Deepwell's analysis of *Inside the Visible* in the first case study.

[104] Deepwell, 'Feminist Curatorial Strategies and Practices', p. 75.

[105] For more exhibitions, see the hugely important timeline of exhibitions of feminist art and contemporary women artists post-1970 compiled by art historian Katy Deepwell, http://www.ktpress.co.uk/feminist-art-exhibitions.asp

2012, which 'activates, celebrates and evaluates feminist "herstoriography" and museum strategies.'[106]

In terms of recurring global exhibitions, the 51st Venice Biennale (2005), directed by María de Corral and Rosa Martínez, was known as 'la biennale feminista.' *documenta 12* (2007), directed by Roger M Buergel and curated by Ruth Noack, in Kassell, Germany, is remembered as 'the "feminist" Documenta.'[107] Curator Annie Fletcher wrote that '*documenta 12* marked a turning point in the understanding of feminism, as it made feminism again part of our necessary critical repertoire for reading subjectivity and, simply, for working within contemporary art today.'[108] Fletcher reflected,

> This 'normalisation' of feminist critique and/or work, coupled with the fact that approximately half of the artists included in the exhibition were female - and this was not presented as a big deal - was a relief after two-and-a-half years of highly self conscious projects about feminism and art, and a rather ferocious and often bitter debate which emerged in relation to certain of them [sic].[109]

Around the same time there were several significant projects in major galleries focussing on the place of women in institutional histories, particularly aimed at redressing the lack of work by women represented in permanent collections and programming: *The Second Museum of Our Wishes* (2007-10) at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, Sweden; *ells@pompidou* (2009-10), curated by Camille Morineau at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, France and then Seattle Art Museum, Seattle, USA (2012-13)*; Modern Women* (2010), run by a group of curators including Connie Butler and Alexandra Schwartz at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, USA, which was a series of exhibitions and films incorporated into the museum's programme. Publications ensued from each of these as well.[110] Another major event was *The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts* (2007), a symposium at the Museum of Modern Art, New York which aimed to 'examine ways in which gender is currently addressed by artists, museums and the academy, and its future role in art practice and scholarship.'[111] The keynote speakers were art historians Lucy Lippard and Anne Wagner, with a

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[106] The Cross Arts Projects, 'National Feminist Art Exhibition 2015', 2013 <http://www.crossart.com.au/index.php/national-feminist-art-exhibition-2015.html>. See also the much smaller exhibition *A Different Temporality: Aspects of Australian Feminist Art Practice 1975-1985* (2011), curated by Kyla McFarlane at the Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, which examined a period of feminist practice partially-overlooked by the larger exhibitions in Europe and USA, a temporal gap in the larger exhibitions in the global north identified by Katy Deepwell in her ICA workshop *Eclipsing the Eighties* (2011).

[107] Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry, 'How to Be Seen: An Introduction to Feminist Politics, Exhibition Cultures and Curatorial Transgressions', in *Politics in a glass case: feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 1–21 (p. 12).

[108] Annie Fletcher, 'On Feminism (Through a Series of Exhibitions)', *Afterall*, 17 (2008) <http://dx.doi.org/http://www.afterall.org/journal/issue.17/feminism.through.series.exhibitions>.

[109] See Fletcher's first note for more detail about responses to *WACK!*

[110] John Peter Nilsson and Moderna Museet (Stockholm) Moderna Museet (Malmö), *Det Andra önskemuseet/The Second Museum of Our Wishes* (Göttingen: Steidl, 2010); Centre Pompidou, *Elles@centrepompidou* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2009); Cornelia H. Butler and Alexandra Schwartz, *Modern Women: Women Artists at the Museum of Modern Art* (The Museum of Modern Art, 2010).

[111] Museum of Modern Art, 'Panel Discussions & Symposia / Adult Programs. The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts', *Events*, 2013 <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/events/5>.

speaker line-up of leading international artists, curators, critics and art historians, with Catherine de Zegher and Linda Nochlin as respondents.

The intensity of feminist activity in 2007 led to a series of one-off research events that considered critically the conditions and meanings of such a rare and quite unexpected moment. The Association of Art Historians Annual Conference panel *The Year Was 2007: Historical Understanding, Difference and the Contemporary Exhibition Effect* (2008), convened by art historians Alison Rowley and Griselda Pollock, for example, was organised around the question of whether 2007 would be 'remembered for a flutter around a historical feminism on the edges of the art world whose main business resumed with an international agenda unaltered by feminist and other critical theory, or did it mark a significant series of exhibitionary reflections at the intersections of art making, art thinking, art writing that are inclusive and politically creative?'[112] The Moderna Museet, Stockholm also staged a significant conference, *Feminisms, Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2008), initiated by art historians Jessica Sjöholm-Skrubbe, Malin Hedlin-Hayden and Anna Lundström, with speakers including Mary Kelly, Maura Reilly, Griselda Pollock and Amelia Jones, which led to the publication *Feminisms is Still Our Name: Seven Essays on Historiography and Curatorial Practices* (2010), edited by Jessica Sjöholm-Skrubbe and Malin Hedlin Hayden. The Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association has also organised a small conference titled *Feminism and the Museum* (2013) at the National Library of Australia, Canberra. The remit is 'the way in which second wave feminism is, or can be, collected and displayed in museums, and the role of material culture in memorializing feminism.'[113]

2007 and its aftermath was something of a catalyst for the study of feminisms and curating, although the full significance is hard to grasp yet, not least because it is still irrupting in some locations. Some even note that overall response to the moment has been 'confused.'[114] Along with specific implications at the local level of each project and exhibition, however, registered in reviews and symposia internationally, the concentration of attention on the histories of feminism in art has changed the terms on which feminism became visible (or not) in the discursive field. Across the USA, Eastern Europe and Western Europe and further afield, however problematic, this bout of exhibitions and events seems to have at least partly reaffirmed feminist histories and practices for an 'art world' that had previously seemed relatively indifferent, especially following *Documenta 11* which, according to Pollock and art historian Alison Rowley, had almost normalised of a form of 'post-feminism.'[115] The discourse around feminism/s and curating has been renewed by the scale and

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[112] Griselda Pollock and Alison Rowley, 'The Year Was 2007: Historical Understanding, Difference and the Contemporary Exhibition Effect', *Academic Sessions: London 2008*, 2008 <http://www.aah.org.uk/annual-conference/past-conferences/2008/academic-sessions-2008/academic-sessions-london-2008-19> [accessed 22 September 2013].

[113] Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson, 'Feminism and the Museum' <http://genderinstitute.anu.edu.au/feminism-and-museum> [accessed 16 September 2013].

[114] Dimitrakaki and Perry, p. 2.

[115] Griselda Pollock and Alison Rowley, 'Now and Then: Feminism: Art and History. A Critical Response to Documenta XI' (CentreCATH, 2006), p. 1.

intensity of events since 2007, and has refocused on the effects of various forms of historicisation and questions of depoliticisation, monumentalisation, marginalisation and exclusion.[116]

The Leverhulme-funded research network *Transnational perspectives on women's art, feminism and curating* (2010-2012), initiated by art historian Lara Perry was the first major longer-term project in academia devoted to the critical analysis of feminism's impact on the practices of collection and presentation of art.[117] The network aimed at sharing information and forging shared intellectual languages to develop a research practice, language and community that could accommodate the challenges presented by a globalized field of study.[118] The network organised three symposia and four workshops across North America and Europe, including post-socialist Eastern Europe.[119] One symposium was *Common Differences: Issues for Feminist Curating in Post-Socialist Europe* (2011), convened by art historian Katrin Kivimaa at the Estonian Academy of Arts, Tallinn, Estonia, which turned to 'theoretical debates around issues of representation and knowledge production in Third World and postcolonial feminisms,' in particular the work of Chandra Talpade Mohanty.[120] In her book *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (2012), Kivimaa explored Mohanty's attentiveness to both 'the micropolitics of context, subjectivity and struggle,' and to 'the macropolitics of global economic and political systems and processes' that participants were asked to keep in mind when addressing the issues for feminism and curating in Eastern Europe.[121] Kivimaa extrapolated this further still,

> To what extent can the dominant models of exchange and transfer between globally and locally/regionally disseminated knowledges be un-done and reconfigured? How do we envision the ethics of relating globally dominating narratives and agendas of feminist research to an in-depth analysis of the particularities and complexities of the local – i.e. to the web of material, ideological, institutional and personal conditions that shape and determine the ways, forms and formats through which feminist curating and exhibition culture unfold in different locations?[122]

The nascent question in Katy Deepwell's taxonomy from 2006 of where feminism meets the historical field and how feminist curatorial practices and exhibitions negotiate models of internationalism has re-emerged with a new significance. Katrin Kivimaa's formulation of multiple narratives and agendas of feminist research is recast in terms of geographies of power, where local

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[116] See for example Joanne Heath, 'Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Blockbuster Retrospective', in *Feminism Reframed*, ed. by Alexandra M Kokoli (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008), pp. 20–40; Ella S Mills, 'Working Towards Transnational Feminisms in Contemporary "Global Feminist" Exhibitions: Self-reflexivity and Curatorial Integrity' (presented at the Re-imagining Gender and Politics: Transnational Feminist Interventions, Research Centre for Post-Colonial Studies, Goethe University, Frankfurt, 2010).

[117] Lara Perry, 'Transnational Perspectives on Women's Art, Feminism and Curating', *An International Research Network*, 2013 <http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/research/irn>.

[118] Lara Perry, 'Transnational Perspectives on Women's Art, Feminism and Curating'.

[119] For the full list of events, see http://arts.brighton.ac.uk/research/irn/workshops-and-symposia

[120] Katrin Kivimaa, 'Editor's Preface', in *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe* (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2012), pp. 7–17 (p. 8).

[121] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Under Western Eyes Revisited: Feminist Solidarity through Anticapitalist Struggles', *Signs*, 28, 499–535 (p. 501).

[122] Kivimaa, p. 9.

sites of curatorial practice meet feminism in its different forms in different exhibitionary configurations no longer containable within a single chronological narrative of development. Like art historian and theorist Angela Dimitrakaki in her article 'Five O'Clock in the Sun,' which questions feminist art historical temporality in a different context (media art), Kivimaa sets up a way of challenging hegemonic models of feminist theory by inviting responsiveness to specificity which always negotiates the global, but exceeds its structurations as well.[123] To my mind this lends a new clarity to Griselda Pollock's theorisation of generations and geographies, of grounded feminist readings positioned within a framework of history and questions of difference on the one hand, and location on the other, which is social, cultural and political.[124]

Dimitrakaki on the contrary asks whether feminist art history as it has developed in the so-called West is methodologically equipped to negotiate spaces that do not share its history of feminist practice or the same forms of hegemony.[125] In Kivimaa's compilation Dimitrakaki also states that,

> Overall, discussions concerning feminist curating are still stuck on the production and display of feminist or women's art, underplaying the need for a more theoretical analysis focused on the political, social and economic implications of the curatorial act as a feminist intervention. Given the significance of the curatorial figure, the dearth of feminist theory about curating suggests that feminism has failed to grasp, and respond to, a shift of great momentum in the contemporary art world.[126]

Dimitrakaki brackets off most of the discourse on feminism/s and curating in order to make clear the need she sees for a different kind of analysis more focussed on radical practices that depart entirely from institutionalised contexts. I do not dispute her direction of inquiry because it represents one possibility among many. Nevertheless, even if the events since 2007 lived only temporarily and did not overhaul the art world completely, the archive has expanded considerably, changing the way plural and intersecting histories of feminism are remembered and accessed. At the *Feminisms and Curating* panel at NORDIK Conference for Art History (2012) in Stockholm, curator Alexandra Schwartz commented in her paper 'MoMA's Modern Women Project, Feminism, and Curatorial Practice' that large institutions like MoMA change course at a slower speed than a large ship. This is where a notion of feminist practice works on many levels. Since 2007, the conceptualisations of forms of feminist curatorial practices, their strategies and effects have expanded. More than ever before there are now discursive formations along the lines of how curatorial practice might enact feminist strategies performatively, for example, and reposition viewers from within large institutions. These conditions have produced opportunities for intensive research and publication, and have also established new histories for emerging feminist practices. To re-read Kivimaa in a slightly different way, when she asks how we might 'envision the ethics relating globally dominating narratives and

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[123] Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Five O'Clock on the Sun', *Third Text*, 19 (2005), 269–82 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528820500049460>.

[124] Pollock, *Generations and Geographies in the Visual Arts: Feminist Readings*, p. xii.

[125] Dimitrakaki, 'Five O'Clock on the Sun'.

[126] Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Feminist Politics and Institutional Critiques: Imagining a Curatorial Commons', in *Working with Feminism: Curating and Exhibitions in Eastern Europe*, ed. by Katrin Kivimaa (Tallinn: Tallinn University Press, 2012), pp. 19–39 (p. 26).

agendas of feminist research to an in-depth analysis of the particularities and complexities of the local,' she clearly disputes the homogeneity of Western feminism, but she also asks the question openly and in terms of ethics. My own research question is one of ethics, of care and responsibility towards politics and positions that do not marginalise, so unlike Dimitrakaki I see the existent discourses on feminism/s and curating, and feminist interventions in art's histories as vital resources for an open project of re-conceiving feminist and curatorial practices. Without cutting off the histories and discursive contexts on the basis of their internal limits, however, I am stirred to ask what has moved into the background since 2007, which I shall return to in the next chapter.

Postcolonialism

In 1978, literary critic Edward Said wrote in his article 'The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions' that 'the Orient' was a construction of discourse which he called 'Orientalism.' This was 'not only an orderly discipline of study but a set of institutions, a latent vocabulary (or a set of enunciative possibilities), a subject matter, and finally— as it emerges ... at the end of the nineteenth century— subject races.'[127] In 2001, historian Robert J C Young wrote that Said's development

> [D]emonstrated that the habitual practices, and the full range of effects of colonialism on the colonized territories and their peoples, could be analysed conceptually and discursively, and it was this that created the academic field of postcolonialism and enabled such a range of subsequent theoretical and historical work.[128]

Said's approach therefore signalled a paradigm shift for the West where the functions of colonialism could no longer normalised and subsumed within wide cultural narratives of progress. The ideology of colonialism could be named as imperialism, enabling analysis of the sets of beliefs and processes that construct and maintain the 'Other' in relations of power, not just 'elsewhere' but in imaginative and scholarly textual sites in Europe and the West. The emergence of the postcolonial therefore inaugurated the academic recognition of the long agony of colonial oppression and the struggles against it, whether in formal decolonisation or otherwise. This in turn enabled the emergence of new ways of thinking and acting, facilitating new forms of creative agency and theoretical resources for peoples subjected to violence, oppression and marginalisation under colonialism, not just in the past but even as it continues and takes on new forms.[129]

From very early on, the postcolonial condition was inflected by feminism. Gayatri Spivak presented her paper 'Europe as an Other' at the conference *Europe and its Others* (1984-5) at the

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[127] Edward W. Said, 'The Problem of Textuality: Two Exemplary Positions', *Critical Inquiry*, 4 (1978), 673–714 (p. 711).

[128] Robert J C Young, 'Concepts in History: Colonialism', in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), pp. 13–24 (p. 18).

[129] Many, including Indigenous peoples, reject the term 'postcolonial' because of the implication inherent in its etymology that colonialism has now passed. The usage I employ in the thesis does not deny this possibility, but refers to the shift of the terms in which colonialism can be spoken about in dominant discursive spaces.

University of Essex, which destabilised the centrality of Europe in the official configuration, and raised the possibility of the other finding a subject position. This paper led to 'The Rani of Sirmur' (1985) which further interrogated the concept of the hidden subject configured ideologically in the archive. The 'Third World Woman' is obscured in the archive through its textual formations determined by race and class, further complicated by gender.[130] Spivak wrote, 'Between patriarchal subject-formation and imperialist object constitution, it is the dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject as female that is successfully effaced.'[131] Spivak read across the archive of imperial Indian history to identify and locate the specificity of the *Rani* or Queen of Sirmur who was recorded as intending to perform *sati* or widow self-immolation. Spivak found, however, that 'the Rani was not in' the various archives she consulted, and that she 'emerges only when she is needed in the space of imperial production.'[132] Spivak's critique established that imperialist ideology and the archive can function to obscure she who is 'other' to the 'other', that is, the 'indigenous patriarchal' subject, who is in turn 'other' to British imperialists.[133]

The wider socio-political field of postcolonialism, anti-racism and feminism is similarly complex, and does not align all people subjected to oppression or effacement along a single, flattened plane. Spivak writes in 'The Rani of Sirmur' that '"The Colonizing Power" is far from monolithic,' and that its 'class composition and social positionality are necessarily heterogenous.'[134] The historical relationship between white feminism(s) and b/Black feminism(s), for example, is not direct in the sense that they share a single politics of resistance against a homogenous form of patriarchal oppression. Angela Davis wrote in her article 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves' (1972) about the effects of historical slavery in America on configurations of gender. A degree of agency arose for Black women in the home by taking charge of domestic responsibilities and care work: 'This role was dictated by the male supremacist ideology of white society in America; it was also woven into the patriarchal traditions of Africa.'[135] Simultaneously Black women worked in the fields alongside enslaved Black men, and were as violently assaulted by white masters in a situation of 'deformed equality.'[136] But at the same time, Black women, for Davis, 'attaining a practical awareness of the oppressor's utter dependence on her,' were afforded an insight into their own transformative capacities.[137] Women fought back and asserted themselves 'over and

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[130] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', *History and Theory*, 24 (1985), 247–72 (p. 265).

[131] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', p. 268.

[132] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', p. 270.

[133] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', p. 268.

[134] Spivak, 'The Rani of Sirmur: An Essay in Reading the Archives', p. 254.

[135] Angela Davis, 'Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves', *The Massachusetts Review*, 13 (1972), 81–100 (p. 84).

[136] Davis, p. 89.

[137] Davis, p. 89.

against terrifying obstacles,' and crucially women fought alongside their men.[138] Davis wrote, the Black woman generally,

> [W]as in no sense an authoritarian figure; neither her domestic role nor her acts of resistance could relegate the [Black] man to the shadows. On the contrary, she herself had just been forced to leave behind the shadowy realm of female passivity in order to assume her rightful place beside the insurgent male.[139]

In the distinct but related context of Australia, Indigenous women's experiences of oppression in the form of patriarchal colonialism have generally not corresponded with white women's experiences of patriarchal oppression. Professor of Indigenous Studies Aileen Morton-Robinson, in her book *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (2000) named the largely unacknowledged privilege of white Australian women. She explained,

> Whiteness confers both dominance and privilege; it is embedded in Australian institutions and in the social practices of everyday life. It is naturalised, unnamed and unmarked, and it is represented as the human condition that defines normality and inhabits it.[140]

In many cases historically and contemporarily, white women have stood to gain from the oppression of Indigenous people.[141] Moreton-Robinson articulated the different priorities of white feminism and Indigenous women and feminists. In terms of care work, for example, 'unlike white feminists, Indigenous women are not concerned with child-minding centres for working women. Indigenous women want control of the fostering and welfare of Indigenous children to be placed in the hands of Indigenous people,' following a long history of the forced institutionalisation of Indigenous children.[142] Such a divergence of interests has paralleled a high level of unresponsiveness to Indigenous women's specific aims and interests on the part of white feminists, Moreton-Robinson writes, despite nominal acknowledgement of Indigenous women intermittently.[143]

Chandra Talpade Mohanty has written about practices of solidarity across different forms of feminism, attentive to different configurations of power in her book *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (2003). She writes,

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[138] Davis, p. 98.

[139] Davis, p. 98.

[140] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2000), p. 172.

[141] For a discussion about different stances on land and self-determination, for example, see the chapter 'Tiddas Speaking Strong: Indigenous Women's Self-Presentation within Australian Feminism,' in Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*.

[142] I explore paternalism in the next chapter in the section on contestations of 'care'. Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, p. 167.

[143] For discussion about the limits of white feminist action, see Moreton-Robinson; and for discussion about the nominal appropriation of anti-racism by (white) feminism, see Mary Childers and bell hooks, 'A Conversation about Race and Class', in *Conflicts in feminism*, ed. by Marianne Hirsch and Evelyn Fox Keller (New York ; London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 60–81.

> Decolonizing feminisms involves a careful critique of the ethics and politics of Eurocentrism, and a corresponding analysis of the difficulties and joys of crossing cultural, national, racial, and class boundaries in the search for feminist communities anchored in justice and equality.[144]

Spivak, Davis, Moreton-Robinson and Mohanty's contributions and challenges to critical thinking and the field of feminism have all been formative for my work, and I try to cultivate responsiveness to their main points in the case studies. It is hoped that the case studies, and affiliated curatorial practices, serve as key examples of postcolonial exhibition practices with a relationship to feminism, women and/or sexual difference.

Looking further back before the case studies, in the art world there are several key events and statements that mark the appearance and development of postcolonial exhibition practices. In the history of global exhibitions, *Magiciens de la Terre* (1988), curated by Jean-Hubert Martin at Centre Pompidou signalled an epistemological shift. The exhibition

> United the work of over a hundred artists and, since only half would be described as Western, it radically challenged the Western art system from within. *Magiciens de la Terre* argued for the universality of the creative impulse and endeavoured to offer direct aesthetic experience of contemporary works of art made globally and presented on equal terms.[145]

One of Martin's aims was to counteract Eurocentrism which had been exemplified by the preceding exhibition *"Primitivism" in 20th Century Art: Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (1984), organised by William Rubin at the Museum of Modern Art which sought to 'examine the crucial influence of the tribal arts of Africa, Oceania and North America on modern painters and sculptors.'[146] *Magiciens* has been criticised for reinforcing essentialist tropes, for example by critic and curator Geeta Kapur who criticised the exhibition for basing the paradigm for contemporary art 'on the binary of the *indigenous* and the *avant-garde*, on seeing these categories (yet again) in geographical terms: the avant-garde mapped over the northern zone, the indigenous across the south, encouraging further demarcations that maintain the center-periphery model.'[147] It has also been recognised for enabling a new visibility of non-European cultural practices. For Kapur, the 'bold topography' of *Magiciens* also signalled a new curatorial engagement with 'history *and* geography... in the semiotic grid of signs and meanings as embedded in the material conditions of their own production.'[148] In 1996, cultural theorist Nikos Papasterigiadis reflected that *Magiciens,* like its predecessor *"Primitivism,"* provided 'a spectacular starting point for a number of other mega-exhibitions,' prompting exhibition practice to foreground 'the relationship between aesthetic practices and cultural difference.'[149] The problematic

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[144] Chandra Talpade Mohanty, 'Introduction: Decolonization, Anticapitalist Critique, and Feminist Commitments', in *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 1–13 (p. 11).

[145] Lucy Steeds and others, *Making Art Global (Part 2): 'Magiciens de La Terre' 1989* (London: Afterall Books, 2014).

[146] 'Major Publication Accompanies "Primitivism" Exhibition' (The Museum of Modern Art, 1984).

[147] Geeta Kapur, 'Curating: In the Public Sphere', in *Cautionary Tales: Critical Curating* (New York: apexart, 2007), pp. 56–68 (p. 59).

[148] Kapur, p. 59.

[149] Nikos Papastergiadis, 'Aboriginality and Its Audience', in *Abstracts: New Aboriginalities* (SWAPP, 1996), p. 11.

discursive formations and new historical visibility facilitated by these exhibitions endure as a complex of coordinates shaping any project set on transforming the museum's modes of collection and display.

By the 1990s, the history of the museum was being rewritten as a specifically European construct with implications for non-European cultures. There seem to be two trajectories in the discourse. First, some statements forged relations to a broader cultural politics of multiculturalism, diversity and pluralism, which was symptomatic of governmental social inclusion agendas in several sites of the West. For example, the compilation *Exhibiting Cultures* (1991), edited by curators Ivan Karp and Steven D Lavine, emphasised the plurality of possibilities of exhibition practices in the United States. They wrote,

> Exhibitions made today may seem obviously appropriate to some viewers precisely because those viewers share the same attitudes as the exhibition makers, and the exhibitions are cloaked in familiar presentational styles. We discover the artifice when we look at older installations or those made in other cultural contexts. The very nature of exhibiting, then, makes it a contested terrain. In the United States at this historical moment, especially given the heightened worldwide interest in multicultural and intercultural issues, the inherent contestability of museum exhibitions is bound to open the choices made in those exhibitions to heated debate.[150]

The second intertwining trajectory of the postcolonial shift in the discourse surrounding the European history of the museum seems to be characterised by critical theoretical inquiry into the complex, structural and institutional processes by which difference, exclusion, marginalisation and repression are produced and inscribed in and by the museum institution. In *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (1995), for example, Tony Bennett's Foucauldian analysis of the cultural conditions of the emergence of the museum in the nineteenth century revealed the processes by which a universal concept of (white) 'man—the outcome of evolution' came to be posited as the object, and subject, of knowledge, to the exclusion of other discursive formations. He identified a tension,

> [W]ithin this space of representation between the apparent universality of the subject and object of knowledge (man) which it constructs, and the always socially partial and particular ways in which this universality is realized and embodied in museum displays. This tension... [supplies] the discursive co-ordinates for the emergence of contemporary museum policies and politics oriented to securing the parity of representation for different groups and cultures within the exhibitionary practices of the museum.[151]

One major signal of the changing exhibition landscape was the establishment of Iniva (the Institute of International Visual Arts, originally inIVA) by the Arts Council in England in 1994, 'to address an imbalance in the representation of culturally diverse artists, curators and writers.'[152] Iniva was later criticised for shirking any responsibility to publicly contribute to the debates around cultural difference. Reflecting on this moment in 2002 in the *Third Text Reader*, cultural worker and critic Kobena Mercer commented that post-Empire Britain in the mid-1990s was characterised by contradictions: 'The particularities of Britain's skewed insertion into the world system of modernity

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[150] Stephen D Lavine and Ivan Karp, 'Introduction: Museums and Multiculturalism', in *Exhibiting Cultures: the poetics and politics of museum display* (Washington: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1991), pp. 1–9 (p. 1).

[151] Tony Bennett, *The Birth of the Museum: History, Theory, Politics* (London [Routledge, 1995), p. 7.

[152] Iniva, 'Who We Are' <http://www.iniva.org/about_us/about_iniva/who_we_are>.

enable the contradictory co-existence of regressive neo-nationalism and multicultural normalization within its art world.'[153] In these conditions, he wrote, 'we may understand inIVA's unpopularity as an outcome of its association with the beaurocritization of cultural theory.'[154]

> In 1987, the journal *Third Text* was established to offer,

> A platform not only for the contestation of the racism and sexism inherent in the dominant discourses of art and culture, but [to investigate the] historical shift away from the centre of the dominant culture to its (so-called) periphery... it appears necessary to develop a constructive international communication beyond the intellectual paralysis which has characterized much of (recent) Western critical discourse.[155]

Like Iniva, *Third Text* was also later considered by some to have been co-opted by a publishing agenda.[156]

Similar complexities and contradictions surround major historical exhibitions in other locations in the West. In Australia, for example, the 3rd Biennale of Sydney (1979), curated by Nick Waterlow included work by Aboriginal artists for the first time under the theme 'European dialogues.'[157] This preceded the first occasion on which Aboriginal women represented Australia at the 47th Venice Biennale (1997), as I explore in the second case study. The discourse on Aboriginal art's (re)emergence as contemporary art in exhibitions is subject to intense contradictions. As Anne-Marie Willis and Tony Fry later wrote, 'overt or covert, structural and institutional racism needs to be the main focus rather than "Aboriginal art".'[158]

In 1996, art theorist Jean Fisher's editorial 'Some thoughts on "Contaminations"' was published in *Third Text,* which marks an important pause in the changing exhibition landscape. She problematised some areas attentive to postcoloniality and cultural difference in contemporary art that had hitherto disregarded some crucial complexities. Fisher criticised a tendency of interdisciplinary frameworks to be 'overridden by [questions] of context—national or ethnic identity, sociopolitics, and so forth.' She wrote,

> I am not advocating here a return to some art-for-art's sake formalist critique, but asking how we might more effectively understand the processes of art, especially where inter-cultural symbolic orders are employed, without reducing them to say, anthropology or sociology. Visual art remains a materially-based process, irrespective of medium, which functions on the level of affect not semiotics alone...[159]

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[153] Kobena Mercer, 'Ethnicity and Internationality: New British Art and Diaspora-Based Blackness', in *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory*, ed. by Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 116–22 (p. 121).

[154] Mercer, p. 121.

[155] 'Why Third Text?' (Carfax Publishing Co, 1992).

[156] Gilroy, I.

[157] '3rd Biennale of Sydney (1979)', *Biennale of Sydney* <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/1979-2/> [accessed 18 November 2013].

[158] Anne-Marie Willis and Tony Fry, 'Art as Ethnocide: The Case of Australia', in *The Third Text Reader: On Art, Culture, and Theory*, ed. by Rasheed Araeen, Sean Cubitt, and Ziauddin Sardar (London: Continuum, 2002), pp. 123–32 (p. 124).

[159] Jean Fisher, 'Editorial: Some Thoughts on "Contaminations"', *Third Text*, 9 (1995), p. 6.

Fisher also reflected on the efficacy of the politics of identity: on the one hand, strategies of visibility have had limited success, she wrote, 'helping to force cultural studies [and postcolonial studies] onto the academic map' and 'siphoning money' to establish *Third Text* and Iniva.[160] By forcing art to take on an essentialist position, however, 'it becomes excluded by the exclusionary politics it proffers.'[161] Instead, Fisher diagnosed the dilemma:

> [H]ow to express one's worldview, with all the multiple cultural inflections that inform it, without betraying either one's historical or geographic specificity or art, and without being caught in the web of signs that are all too consumable as exotic commodity[?] Perhaps one needs to think cultural expression not on the level of the sign but in terms of concept and deep structure: to consider both the work's internal movement and what governs the aesthetic choices an artist might make about materials and process, and the material relation the work has with the viewer.[162]

An earlier version of this paper had been presented in 1995 at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, Boston, the year before *Inside the Visible.* Fisher's text resonates with the exhibition which focussed curatorial attention primarily on the materiality of selected works, not in an abstracted sense but in relation to the respective artists' specific cultural positions and geopolitical locations, registered on deep psycho-symbolic levels, without over-determining their work as representative of nationality or ethnicity. Some works were also considered in relation to language but at the same time to space, alterity and uncertainty, therefore not reducible to a curatorial thesis or soundbyte.

Documenta 11 (2002), directed by Okwui Enwezor, aimed to reveal 'how local specificities create new orientations in the global discourse,'[163] through a geographically-decentred curatorial model of multiple 'platforms,' and a new ration of non-Western artists, both strategies of which called into question the Eurocentrism of documenta. Critical voices continue to draw attention to the complexities of difference in a globalised world. Theorist Chin-Tao Wu has raised the ongoing problem of the art of the West coming to stand in for the 'global.'[164] Critic and curator Geeta Kapur has argued that in exhibition practice it is 'necessary to embed the debate in what political theorists call *transnational public spheres*—the product of contrary developments such as the emergence of post-colonial civil societies on the one hand, and of capitalist globalization on the other.'[165]

In Australia, a level of critique has been institutionalised in policy which affects exhibition practices. The *Indigenous Art Code* (2010) grew out of a recommendation in the Senate Inquiry report which established the prevalence of unethical and sometimes unlawful practices against Indigenous artists and communities in the art industry as an overhang of colonial treatment of Indigenous people:

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[160] Fisher, 'Editorial: Some Thoughts on "Contaminations"', p. 5.
[161] Fisher, 'Editorial: Some Thoughts on "Contaminations"', p. 5.
[162] Fisher, 'Editorial: Some Thoughts on "Contaminations"', p. 6.
[163] Brian Wallis, 'Worldly Wise', *artforum.com*, 2002 <http://artforum.com/inprint/issue=200205&id=2748> [accessed 18 November 2013].
[164] Chin-Tao Wu, 'Biennals without Borders?', *Tate Papers*, 2009, 1–6.
[165] Kapur, p. 63.

Indigenous art – Securing the Future (2007).[166] The code's primary aim is to promote fair and ethical trade in works of art by Indigenous artists, which has an impact on exhibition practices in terms of how curators negotiate the provenance and attribution of works, how artists are commissioned and selected and so on.[167] Another related development has been the drive to improve the recognition of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property both within a legal framework and in wider cultural terms, which relates to the kinds of stories, artworks and knowledge that are made visible in exhibition practices. Currently there are no particular laws to protect Indigenous cultural and intellectual rights however.[168]

In the UK, the Arts Council funded the *Inspire Fellowship Scheme* (2009-2012), a Masters programme in curatorial studies at the Royal College of Art for aspiring curators from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds. Following the termination of funding, the conference *New Ways of Seeing:* Curating, Institutions & Cultural Memory (2013) at Liverpool Hope University examined the legacy of the programme and through a day of debates between curators and scholars, debated the state of the field for young curators working now, establishing that it is largely unreceptive to the critical curatorial engagement with difference.[169] As cited earlier, speakers at this conference argued that there is a space and a need for emerging curatorial practices to engage these problematics.

Indigenous curatorial practices

Newly empowered by socio-political changes and access to the theoretical resources of postcolonialism, international Indigenous artists and cultural practitioners reconfigured the field of exhibition practices from at least the 1980s. In 1985-87, artist James Luna enacted *The Artifact Piece,* an installation at the San Diego Museum of Man, in which he lay in a display cabinet, eyes closed, surrounded by his personal belongings. In 2008 he reflected on this work,

> I had long looked at representation of our peoples in museums and they all dwelled in the past. They were one-sided. We were simply objects among bones, bones among objects, and then

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[166] The code was developed firstly by the National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and then by the Australia Council for the Arts, who worked closely with an Industry Alliance Group made up of artists, Indigenous art centres, commercial art galleries, public art galleries, auction houses and visual arts peak bodies; including the Association of Northern, Kimberley and Arnhem Aboriginal Artists, Umi Arts, Ananguku Arts, Desart, Australian Commercial Galleries Association, NAVA and the Australian Indigenous Art Trade Association. For more information on the development of the code, see 'The Code', *Indigenous Art Code*, 2013 <http://www.indigenousartcode.org/index.php/the-code/>.

[167] 'Indigenous Art Code', 2010, p. 1.

[168] For more information, see Terri Janke, *Beyond Guarding Ground: A Vision for National Indigenous Cultural Authority* (Sydney: Terri Janke and Company Pty Ltd, 2009); Terri Janke, 'New Tracks: Indigenous Knowledge and Cultural Expression and the Australian Intellectual Property System' (Terri Janke and Company Pty Ltd, 2012); Arts Law Centre of Australia, 'Arts Law Information Sheet: Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)', *Artists in the Black*, 2013 <http://www.aitb.com.au/information-sheets/entry/indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-icip>.

[169] For example Gilroy's points relayed above.

signed and sealed with a date. In that framework you really couldn't talk about joy, intelligence, humor, or anything that I know makes up our people.[170]

As a curatorial intervention Luna's act highlighted how knowledge of Indigenous people and culture has been actively produced by the display practices of the Enlightenment-model museum, ordered by categorisations according to signs of difference. Writing in a closely related context, Professor of Indigenous Education Lisa Tuhiwai Smith's publication *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999) prompted a shift in the historical relationship between Indigenous people, research and the production of knowledge. Smith argued that one cannot realistically,

> [D]iscuss *methodology* and *indigenous peoples* together, in the same breath, without having an analysis of imperialism, without understanding the complex way in which the pursuit of knowledge is deeply embedded in the multiple layers of imperial and colonial practices.[171]

Smith's argument was that through the decolonisation of research methodologies, power relations could be reconfigured, and Indigenous people could produce and benefit from different relationships to research. Smith articulated several projects associated with a broad, ambitious research programme, necessitated by 'acts of reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting indigenous cultures and languages.'[172] One of these projects is 'connecting', 'which is about good relations,' Smith wrote, noting the importance of Indigenous creation stories which 'link people through genealogy to the land, to stars and other places in the universe, to birds and fish, animals, insects and plants.'[173] Reconnecting is also imperative where these connections and others have been forcibly severed under colonialism. Subsequently, artistic and curatorial networks and collectives have been formed by Indigenous practitioners worldwide.[174] Specifically Indigenous models of curatorial practice have been developed, within particular cultural frameworks and in relation to specific protocols, for example connection and collaboration.[175]

In 2012, white Australian art historian Ian McLean made the remark that perhaps 'the Aboriginal curator is a white thing,' during a public discussion on Aboriginal art and politics.[176] The event itself was titled *Aboriginal Art: It's a White Thing* following the slogan proposed by artist Richard Bell (Kamilaroi people) in his artwork *Bell's Theorem* (2003). Bell's original work

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[170] Kenneth Fletcher, 'James Luna', *Smithsonian magazine*, 2008 <http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/atm-qa-james-luna.html> [accessed 13 October 2013].

[171] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: ZED BOOKS LTD, 2012), p. 2.

[172] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, p. 142.

[173] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, p. 148.

[174] See for example extensive information at 'Aboriginal Curatorial Collective/Collectif Des Conservateurs Autochtones', *Aboriginal Curatorial Collective/Collectif des Conservateurs autochtones* <http://www.aboriginalcuratorialcollective.org> [accessed 22 November 2013].

[175] See for example a specifically Indigenous collaborative model in Michelle McGeough, 'Indigenous Curatorial Practices and Methodologies', *Wicazo Sa Review*, 27 (2012), 13–20.

[176] 'Aboriginal Art: It's a White Thing', *Play - Sydney Opera House Video Portal* <http://play.sydneyoperahouse.com/index.php/media/1616-Aboriginal-Art-Its-White-Thing.html> [accessed 22 September 2013].

commented drily on the industry that both relies on and exploits Aboriginal art, and also questioned the category itself, revealing its ideological baggage and underlying essentialism. McLean's comment that the Aboriginal curator may also 'be' a white thing was ambiguous and troubling. Made with reference to Bell's artwork, McLean's rhetorical question derided a form of tokenism that is alive in the art world, that puts Aboriginal curators in the position of representing 'Aboriginality' in a one-dimensional way, which is clearly ethically-unsound when it does happen. His comment followed a question from the floor about Indigenous curators and 'the black hang' in galleries, which artist Vernon Ah Kee (Kuku Yalandji, Waanji, Yidinji and Gugu Yimithirr peoples) answered by drawing attention to the conservativism of the National Gallery of Australia and white academic expectations of Aboriginal curators (specifically that they must curate only Aboriginal art). This is an important critique, but could easily negate *any* relationship between Aboriginality and curatorial practice, as if the very notion must *always* be the fantasy of an art-going public (white, Aboriginal or otherwise) who conjure up an authority figure in the form of 'the Aboriginal curator' for one reason or another.

Rather, Indigenous practitioners have developed complex curatorial practices. The very notion of curatorial *practice* debunks the model of authorship where the cultural object being produced (in this case an exhibition, its catalogue) simply expresses a message transmitted by its curator/*auteur*. Instead, following the Foucauldian critiques of the curatorial authorship model, Indigenous curatorial practices are not simple expressions of authentic 'Aboriginality' just because the curator is Aboriginal. As Richard Bell highlighted in his artwork, these racialised categories are constructed rather than ontologically true-to-life. Vernon Ah Kee's point was that academic and institutional constraints can curtail the possibilities for Indigenous curators, and mean their work only functions as an authorial statement on Indigenous art.

In 2011, Brenda L Croft curated *Stop (the)Gap: International Indigenous Art in Motion,* an exhibition at the Samstag Gallery at the University of South Australia as part of the Adelaide Film Festival. *Stop(the)Gap* gathered together the work of six contemporary international Indigenous artists who work with new media, in a framework of self-representation in light of persistent global colonialism which nevertheless affects Indigenous peoples in specific ways. Croft's curatorial methodology was to consult Indigenous curator colleagues in Aotearoa (New Zealand), the United States and Canada, and ask them to suggest an Indigenous artist to participate. By selecting artists through a network, Croft counteracted the problematic curatorial method of 'globe-trotting' and selecting artists via brief and transitory gestures. In the light of Lisa Tuhiwai Smith's point that connecting is a distinctly Indigenous research project, for me Croft's curation of *Stop(the)Gap* represents a moment of politicised practice that enacts and demonstrates the possibility of relational curatorial methodologies, which are specifically Indigenous, without being essentialist or authorial. It exemplifies one challenge to the bleak essentialising forecast that Ah Kee and McLean surmised for Indigenous/Aboriginal curators, but the discourse needs to pivot in order for these kinds of relational Indigenous curatorial interventions to register—not as entirely banalised or compromised by institutionalisation, but as ethical practices.

Chapter Two. Reading for the emergence of the ethical

This chapter extends the introduction by examining the ethical as it emerges in multiple fields of practice: in the discourse of curatorial studies, in institutional codes of ethics that 'govern' practice within museum and galleries, and in the discourse on museum ethics. There are also questions of ethics emergent in one particular area of the most recent 'feminisms and curating' literature. As none of these discussions has yet made an expanded connection to relationality in feminist ethics, or the interdisciplinary, critical concept of care, I turn to feminist ethics and consider these major developments. Lastly I situate my research at the intersection of this interdisciplinary field and foreground the work of the thesis.

Ethics and curating

The final issue in *Manifesta Journal's* second series, published in 2010-11, titled *Ethics,* posed the open question of where ethics meets the work of the curator. This publication marked the first occasion in curatorial studies where ethics did not arise as supplementary point in a wider investigation into curatorial practice, but as an open-ended site for critical inquiry and reflection in its own right. It is also the only site I know of that investigates the relationship between ethics and the curator and the temporary exhibition, as opposed to the museum or gallery, with the exception of curator Maura Reilly's forthcoming book *Curatorial Activism and Ethical Responsibility* (2015).[177] *Manifesta Journal*'s *Ethics* issue featured six main articles by curators, writers, critics and academics, in addition to six very brief 'statements' consisting of a paragraph or less offering a comment on curating and ethics, as well as three interviews and five 'reflections', much like reviews of exhibitions but with no clear link to the theme of ethics necessarily. With his article 'The Curator's Demands: Towards an Ethics of Commitment', writer and critic Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro came closest to my research. His main argument is that responsibility for the other is at the core of curating:

> The only mandate or principle the curator has, which he shouldn't betray, is that of fidelity and respect towards the other. Curatorial ethics therefore comes from an ethical experience of the subject, which is that of responsibility... That is why curating is an ethical profession, because, from the very etymology of the term, its task it to take care and be in charge of things, "to be responsible for" things.[178]

Hernández-Navarro relocates care at the centre of curatorial practice, not in the traditional sense of care for a collection, but in the form of an expanded responsibility to 'the other' very broadly. He develops this notion through four main points. Firstly, the turn to ethics in contemporary thought paradoxically occurs 'at a time when morality (as a system of ethical traditions) has lost its structure

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[177] I return to museum ethics below.

[178] Miguel. A Hernández-Navarro, 'The Curator's Demands: Towards an Ethics of Commitment', *Manifesta Journal*, 2, 2010, 5–12.

and has been reduced to radical individualism.'[179] This may be an effect of neo-liberalism. Hernández-Navarro refers to philosopher Slavoj Žižek and sociologist Zygmant Bauman who respectively observe that the contemporary subject is governed by the imperative of pleasure[180], pursuing the satisfaction of desire in the form of an ethics of consumption, which is only possible by the suspension of our responsibility to others.[181]

Hernández-Navarro's second point is that in such a culture of 'deresponsibilization,' codes of ethics are necessitated for the regulation of a 'subject who has already lost his sense of commitment and responsibility before the world.'[182] He uses the term deontology to describe a system of ethics which consists of the adherence to rules: 'these are ethical codes that, in a way, work almost like laws: citizens' "moral duties" that are no longer a reflection of subjectivity and internal experience, but a pseudo-legal imposition from the pure exterior.[183] I would challenge the author's complete dismissal of codes of ethics as entirely an imposition from the pure exterior, because codes can be read as dynamic and responsive to an extent which I detail in the next section. Hernández-Navarro's observation, however, identifies a particular effect or tendency of codes of ethics, and also clears the ground for an examination of ethics in curatorial practice itself apart from codes.

Thirdly, Hernández-Navarro reconnects curating with care and responsibility, arguing that commitment is actually always multiple; or more precisely, triple. For him there are three interrelated demands on the curator's responsibility: the institution, the artwork and the public. He elaborates the demands of each, to which the curator must respond. He argues that the curator is responsible for the institution's 'speech,' however this may produce discomfort.[184] Secondly the curator 'must guarantee that the artwork will unfold its full potential.'[185] If the curator over-determines the artwork's speech or potential however, the curator 'turns into an artist. The curator's job here is to maintain balance,'[186] The curator is lastly responsible to 'guarantee the best conditions of accessibility' for the public. The field of mediation, he writes, 'is generally an area of conflict. In fact, the curator's duty is that of watching over that area of contact.'[187]

The interrelated nature of these three demands on the curator lead Hernández-Navarro to make his fourth and final main point, which is that the curator is responsible for several ethical demands which can never be completely fulfilled. He uses the work of Simon Critchley to develop a framework for action, which is open and characterised by 'infinite negotiation' and even 'ethical conflict,' but

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[179] Hernández-Navarro, pp. 5–6.
[180] Slavoj Žižek, *The Fragile Absolute. Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* (London and New York: Verso, 2001).
[181] Zygmant Bauman, *Does Ethics Have a Chance in a World of Consumers?* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008).
[182] Hernández-Navarro, p. 6.
[183] Hernandez-Navarro, p. 6.
[184] Hernández-Navarro, p. 8.
[185] Hernández-Navarro, p. 8.
[186] Hernández-Navarro, p. 9.
[187] Hernández-Navarro, p. 9.

deeply embedded within the curator who mobilises this dissent in the temporary exhibition.[188] Hernández-Navarro's framework is useful because it establishes the world in which the curator works as a field of contestations and competing commitments. This is a rare statement but invaluable for opening up the interrelatedness of the ethical with other modes of practice, whether political or aesthetic, where others have been unwilling to admit that these multi-layered complexities are always at play in curatorial practice.[189]

Nevertheless there are some key directions from Hernández-Navarro in which I want to take my own research. These first became clear when I realised that I had reached a similar understanding by 2011 of the field in which the curator operates to Hernández-Navarro, but through a different route. My research into feminist ethics revealed that the field of ethical commitments in which any subject is embedded is always relational and characterised by multiple ethical demands, which I explore in more detail below. Where Hernández-Navarro and I differ, however, is on his conceptualisation of there being three ethical demands on the curator. I would argue that there are other possibilities, and I would deliberately hesitate to put a limit on how many although these are not endless. The main additional ethical responsibility for curators I am concerned to elaborate is to a politics that stands against the repression and marginalisation of others, especially those for whom there is a violent history of repression and marginalisation, such as women, Aboriginal peoples and so on. Hernández-Navarro might respond that such responsibilities go without saying; perhaps they fall into the same category as a curatorial responsibility to respect the safety and security of others which in fact transcends the curator's work *qua* their being a curator, into the domain of human rights for example. However I would argue that in terms of being open to engagement at the intellectual and affective levels, the proposed responsibilities for generating positions against repression and marginalisation are in fact curatorial responsibilities. The disparity between Hernández-Navarro's view of the field and my own is evidenced, I would argue, in his use of the pronoun 'he' to refer to the curator. This is not the worst crime against women by any means, but its effect is to fold the subjectivity of women curators and artists back into invisibility, even though Hernández-Navarro's ideas for a curatorial ethics may otherwise partly offer the conceptual conditions necessary for their emergence as ethical subjects. Hernández-Navarro's text therefore stands as a valuable although somewhat problematic development in the thinking to date about curatorial practice and its ethical dimension.

In a different vein, curatorial practice itself periodically meets ethics where curators address ethics as a facet of artistic or cultural practice, for example in the forthcoming IX Florence Biennale (2013) titled *Ethics: DNA of Art,* 'the mission of the Florence Biennale is to stir some reflection and critical thinking about the relationship between art and ethics, and the role of the arts in the new millennium.'[190] Another example is the 7th International Architecture Exhibition of the Venice

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[188] Hernández-Navarro, p. 12.

[189] See for example Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents'.

[190] Arte Studio Srl, 'The New Florence Biennale 2013 - IX Edition', *The New Florence Biennale. Ethics: DNA of Art*, 2013 <http://www.florencebiennale.org/e_biennale13.php>.

Biennale (2000) titled *Less Aesthetics More Ethics*, in which director Massimiliano Fuksas sought to 'find a new way to relate to architecture, favoring the research of new ethical responses, rather than simply aesthetics, when developing a project.'[191]

Codes of ethics

This thesis focuses on curatorial practice through the span of a career, and through the archival trace of the exhibition; these are read as the sites of an ethic of care. However following Foucault, curatorial practice emerges in relation to institutions, whether political, social or historical, and this is especially the case when curators are based temporarily within institutions for the preparation and duration of one-off or touring exhibitions. I propose we see codes of ethics as one way that the institution speaks. Although Hernández-Navarro's argument (that codes work like laws implemented from outside curatorial practice) does reveal a tendency in the neo-liberalist art world, speaking theoretically of curating as a practice means that the work of the independent curator emerges in relation and response to codes of ethics. As curator and writer Katerina Gregos has argued however, there is a considerable difference in the ethical standards set by codes 'and the ethical standards that may, or rather *should* apply to independent curators (though these remain largely undefined and unwritten).'[192] Independent curators might distance their practice from codes of ethics for certain reasons, but this move might reveal a certain kind of negative relationship to codes, in itself significant. Keeping this problematic distance in mind, this section considers codes of ethics and their implications for how ethicality is formulated in relation to curatorial practice.

The current ICOM *Code of Ethics for Museums* (2004) was prepared by the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and has been revised since it was first adopted in 1986.[193] 'It is the statement of ethics for museums referred to in the ICOM Statutes, and reflects principles generally accepted by the international museum community.'[194] At the national level, national museums associations interpret the ICOM code and develop codes more specific to the national context. In the UK, for example, the *Code of Ethics for Museums* was produced and revised by the Museums Association (MA) between 2001 and 2008. It applies to all museums and gallery staff in the UK, along with consultants and freelance workers, among others, and may apply internationally where other national ethics codes indicate their support for it.[195] It does not have legal jurisdiction. MA members are expected, however, to 'uphold and promote the *Code of Ethics for Museums* as a

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[191] 2000 Mostra Internazionale di Architettura (7, *Città: Less Aesthetics More Ethics: [7th International Architecture Exhibition] [1] [1]* (Venezia: Marsilio, 2000).

[192] Katarina Gregos, 'The Sovereign and Its Servants: On the Ethics of Curating', *Manifesta Journal*, 2, 2010, 44–50 (p. 45).

[193] See International Council of Museums, 'ICOM Code of Ethics', *ICOM The World Museum Community*, 2010 <http://icom.museum/the-vision/code-of-ethics/>.

[194] International Council of Museums.

[195] Museums Association, 'Code of Ethics for Museums' (Museums Association, 2008), p. 6.

professional obligation.'[196] Its historical precedents are the *Codes of Conduct for People who Work in Museums* (1996); the *Code of Practice for Museum Governing Bodies* (1994); and the *Code of Conduct for Museum Professionals* (1991), which themselves replaced earlier codes.[197] The current version is a product of successive processes of consultation and revision by the MA Ethics Committee, and has been voted for by MA members. Philosopher Judith Chelius Stark commented in 2011 that codes are typically created and adopted by the profession itself and, as such, are expressions of the autonomy and self-regulating nature of the profession.[198] Their ongoing revision is also indicative of the continuous developments in thinking about ethics. Anthropologist and museum director Christina Kreps refers to codes of ethics as 'living documents' because they 'continue to evolve in response to changing values, situations and social movements.'[199] Tristram Besterman, the freelance adviser and writer who is also a former convenor of the MA ethics committee and was involved in the development of the current MA code, has explicitly referred to its socially reflexive moral principles.[200]

The MA *Code of Ethics for Museums* (2008) 'is informed by a belief that ethical behaviour is as much about developing good practice as avoiding malpractice,' and is structured around 'ten core museum values.'[201] These stem from the statement 'Society can expect museums to:'

> Hold collections in trust on behalf of society; focus on public service; encourage people to explore collections for inspiration, learning and enjoyment; consult and involve communities, users and supporters; acquire items honestly and responsibly; safeguard the long-term public interest in the collections; recognise the interests of people who made, used, owned, collected or gave items in the collections; support the protection of natural and human environments; research, share and interpret information related to collections, reflecting diverse views; review performance to innovate and improve.'[202]

In the process of concretising the meanings of ethics and ethical practice, the code necessarily delineates and excludes by its very logic. On the one hand this is aimed at usability and practicality, and on the other, this instates certain limitations. The focus on collections and the implication of the entire museum as an institution, for instance, circumscribes the possibilities for conceiving of ethics, recalling Gregos's comment that codes rarely relate conceptually to the work of independent curators. The abstract level at which the document 'speaks' generalises ethical subjectivity as institutional rather than individual or social, in order to discourage personal gain, but another effect is to produce a

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[196] Museums Association, 'Code of Ethics for Museums', p. 6.

[197] Museums Association, 'Code of Ethics for Museums', p. 6.

[198] Judith Chelius Stark, 'The Art of Ethics. Theories and Applications to Museum Practice', in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 26–40 (p. 37).

[199] Christina Kreps, 'Changing the Rules of the Road: Post-Colonialism and the New Ethics of Museum Anthropology', in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 70–84 (p. 80).

[200] Tristram Besterman, 'Museum Ethics', in *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 431–41 (p. 434).

[201] Museums Association, 'Code of Ethics for Museums', p. 6.

[202] Museums Association, 'Code of Ethics for Museums', p. 9.

polarity between those inside and outside the museum. For example the value 'consult and involve communities, users and supporters' highlights that the museum is not a monolithic authority but in a position of responsibility to engage others directly. But simultaneously the museum is recast as homogeneous: the 'others'' subjectivities do not already inhabit or inflect the configuration 'museum' in the first place, which makes a significant difference in terms of ethical subjectivity. That said, museums adviser Tristram Besterman has argued for the possibility of institutional adjustment to social change through the development of codes of ethics.[203] As a revealing example, the MA *Code of Conduct for Museum Curators* (1991) used the pronoun 'he,' as in the guideline 'A curator is accountable for all objects in his charge...,' whereas the code in its current manifestation uses the gender-neutral pronoun 'they.'[204] The question of institutional versus individual agency is explored further by Hilde Hein, which I investigate below.

In Australia, the national code of ethics was developed by Museums Australia, which was established in 1993 as an advocate for museums and galleries, their collections and the people who work in them. The association is a national membership body working through a network of state and territory branches, Special Interest Groups (SIGs), the national office and an elected Council. The two primary functions of Museums Australia are advocacy to government, (informed by research and consultation) and support for high standards of professional practice.[205] The Museums Australia *Code of Ethics* (adopted 1984, revised 1994 & 1999) 'provides a general guide to assist members in making decisions about the ethical issues with which they may be confronted in their professional activities.' Like the MA *Code of Ethics for Museums* in the UK and the ICOM *Code of Ethics,* the Australian code represents a set of minimum standards and focuses on discrete ethical issues rather than developing a framework for ethical subjectivity, especially not a relational one. For example, the section *Professional Conduct* states that 'Museum officers must not countenance discrimination in race, sex, religion or politics against their professional colleagues, and must not allow rumour or innuendo to affect decisions concerning others.'[206]

Museums Australia also orchestrates national policies: *Women's Policy for Museum Programs and Practice* (2000); *Cultural Diversity Policy* (2000); *Gay & Lesbian Policy Guidelines for Museum Programs and Practice* (1998) and *Continuous Cultures, Ongoing Responsibilities: Principles and Guidelines for Australian Museums Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Heritage* (2005).

These documents all apply to museums and galleries in Australia, alongside the Museums Australia *Code of Ethics*, so there are guidelines for museum and gallery practice broadly that span the major axes along which oppression has functioned historically. The policies have an educative

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[203] Besterman, p. 431.

[204] Museums Association, 'Code of Conduct for Museum Curators' (Museums Association, 1991), p. 13.

[205] Museums Australia, 'About Museums Australia', *Museums Australia*, 2013
    <http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/site/about_us.php>.

[206] Museums Australia, 'Code of Ethics' (Museums Australia, 1999), p. 8.

function as well as establishing minimum standards and guidelines for good practice. The *Women's Policy* for example, to continue the thread on gendered pronouns, addresses the significance of language used in display text:

> 1.14 Non gender-specific language should be used in all museum text relating to inanimate artefacts. For example, marine craft and motor vehicles should be referred to by the pronoun 'it' rather than 'she'. Non-discriminatory language should be used in a generic context. For example, 'people' should be used in place of 'man' or 'mankind'.
>
> 1.15 Text should not be patronising to women.[207]

Nevertheless it is significant that the social and cultural differences each policy addresses are stratified into different documents, however much each policy may emphasise diversity within the main focus they address. Because of this particular discursive formation, psycho-sexual, social and cultural differences find no specific space within the code of ethics for inflection of the way museum and gallery ethics is conceived. There is sparse commentary within codes of ethics or policies on the rationale for these structural formations. The main site of the meta-discourse is museum ethics.

Museum ethics

In the field of museum studies, the discourse on museum ethics has developed in response to the institutionalisation of ethics in the form of codes especially since the 1990s. Some museum practitioners have openly reflected on the processes of developing codes, policies and procedures of ethics from within museums, while others have developed critiques that largely focus on codes' ideological limits.[208] In the *Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics* (2011), edited by museologist Janet Marstine, for example, Marstine and museum practitioner Hilde Hein argue that the emphasis on professionalisation of individual staff members in ethics codes inhibits the moral agency of the museum institution as a whole.[209] Hein likens current ethical structures in museums to legal structures, which are designed to address one 'offense' at a time, rather than cumulative effects of unexamined actions.[210] Museum practitioner Michael Pickering notes the disjuncture where several ethics codes apply at once, for example when a particular national code of ethics states its general support for the *ICOM Code of Ethics*, although there may not necessarily be consensus on particular issues.[211] Museums consultant Lois H Silverman notes in *The Social Work of Museums* (2010) the ICOM *Code of Ethics'* emphasis on 'the care of collections, rather than people', with only one of

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[207] Museums Australia, 'Women's Policy for Museum Programs and Practice' (Museums Australia, 2000), p. 2.

[208] Notably Tristram Besterman.

[209] Janet Marstine, 'The Contingent Nature of the New Museum Ethics', in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3–25 (p. 7).

[210] Hilde Hein, 'The Responsibility of Representation: A Feminist Perspective', in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 112–26 (p. 123).

[211] Michael Pickering, '"Dance through the Minefield": The Development of Practical Ethics for Repatriation', in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics: Redefining Ethics for the Twenty-First-Century Museum* (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), pp. 256–74 (p. 266).

eight sections dedicated to the museum's social responsibility to communities.[212] On the basis of critiques such as these, Marstine asserts that '[m]useum ethics today is not defined by codes.'[213]

Museum ethics is a growing field that has established numerous directions for cross-disciplinary inquiry that are also closely informed by museum practice. Philosopher Judith Chelius Stark places 'current discussions of museum ethics at the intersection of professional ethics and contemporary issues,' which for Stark refers to applied ethics in a professional setting as opposed to theoretical models of ethics.[214] Generally this is accurate: museum ethics discourse converges around ethical issues, visible for example on the Museums Association website section *Ethical Debates* (2013) which organises discussion through a list of key ethical issues that link to sample museum practitioners' positions and perspectives. Topical ethical issues include access; censorship; conflict of interest; freedom of information; governance; human remains and inclusion to name a few.[215] These ethical issues and others have become epicentres of research, debate and discourse in their own right which all form significant contours in the field. Many open up areas that border my own research, for example the relationships between museum ethics, social responsibility, inclusion, social justice and 'social conscience,'[216] and the expanded debates on Indigenous self-determination, including the complexities of repatriation and collaboration with Indigenous communities.[217]

Hilde Hein's writing stands out because it links museum ethics with feminist theory including feminist philosophy. In her chapter in *The Routledge Companion to Museum Ethics,* titled 'The responsibility of representation: A feminist perspective' (2011), Hein examines the philosophical formations of museum ethics that allow or even drive the continued institutionalisation of practices of exclusion. I argued above that the kind of institutional ethical subjectivity invoked by the MA *Code of Ethics* is predicated on a homogenous notion of the museum as a monolithic authority, which Hein raised initially in a general sense. She proposed that,

> The agency attributed to the institution is a sort of fiction. It derives from multiple behaviours exhibited by distinct persons, but is not reducible to the sum of their actions. It is not identifiable as collective behaviour, for it is singular—the performance of the museum.[218]

In these conditions some effects of representational practices by the museum, however tangible, are impossible to be attributed in any specific sense because 'moral responsibility is usually assigned

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[212] Lois H Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums* (Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 37.

[213] Marstine, p. 7.

[214] Stark, p. 28.

[215] 'Ethical Debates', *Museums Association: Ethics*, 2013 <http://www.museumsassociation.org/ethics/11945>.

[216] Gaynor Kavanagh, *Museum Provision and Professionalism* (Routledge, 1994), pp. 38–9; 'A Crisis of Conscience', *the Guardian*, 2007 <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2007/aug/26/acrisisofconscience> [accessed 22 September 2013].

[217] See for example Michael Pickering, 'Where to from Here? Repatriation of Indigenous Human Remains and "The Museum"', in *Museum Revolutions: How Museums Change and are Changed*, ed. by Simon J Knell, Suzanne MacLeod, and Sheila Watson (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), pp. 250–59.

[218] Hilde Hein, p. 115.

individually, not institutionally.'[219] Institutional sexism and racism prevail because 'moral blame is commonly associated with specifiable acts,' whereas systemic 'wrongdoing' is barely conceivable in the current ethical structures: 'like our legal structures, [these] are designed to address one specifiable offense at a time, and not to take note of their cumulative effects.'[220] This offers a valuable starting point to assess the question of curatorial responsibility for feminism and cultural difference, particularly in terms of relationality.

Reading for the ethical in 'feminism and curating' discourse

As explored in Chapter One, the discourse on feminism and curating has expanded since 2007 in response to the spike/s of feminist curatorial activity, but there are precious few sites that address either care or relationality in an ethical sense, or the exhibitions this thesis takes as case studies. What is the status of *fluent* and *Inside the Visible* in this changed moment of the so-called 'feminist blockbuster' in which feminism is presented as a spectacle? The field is now subject to newly-asserted centres and peripheries, which have provoked wide contestation, and differently-constituted practices of mapping and genealogy; but these also have their oversights and silences. What is the significance of the case study exhibitions occurring one decade before 2007? Of particular importance is what becomes of earlier curatorial models for feminist-inflected group exhibitions which did not seek to investigate the history/ies of feminism and art *per se*, but which tracked other relations among women and sometimes men artists. In 2008, art historian Joanne Heath re-drew attention to earlier feminist exhibitions in her text *Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Feminist Blockbuster*. She wrote,

> Back in 1996, *Inside the Visible* signalled the potential of a curatorial practice that is informed by an explicitly feminist attention to the effects of cultural, racial and sexual difference to enrich and transform our understanding of the contribution made by artists who are women to twentieth-century art practice. Over the intervening decade, however, it would seem that the structural possibilities represented by such an intervention appear to have vanished from the cultural agenda, to be replaced by the easy viewing pleasures of the blockbuster retrospective.[221]

While the large-scale feminist exhibitions might first appear to enact feminist strategies, Heath argued, 'a closer examination of those shows reveals how critics and curators have in fact either ruthlessly ignored or wilfully misunderstood the nature of the feminist challenge to existing histories of art.'[222] Heath tracked back to *Inside the Visible* (1996), also my first case study, which gathered together the work of thirty seven women artists from different places and times in the twentieth century, whose work registered common disjunctures and affinities. The exhibition's modes of responding to these were curatorially designed to resist and circumvent assimilation into existing art

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[219] Hilde Hein, p. 122.
[220] Hilde Hein, p. 123.
[221] Heath.
[222] Heath, p. 36.

historical narratives and tropes. Heath also re-examined *Frida Kahlo and Tina Modotti,* (1982) organised by film theorists Peter Wollen and Laura Mulvey at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, which for Heath 'did not invite simplistic comparisons between the two artists as women, but rather created a dialogical space which ensured that neither could become a representative "woman artist."'[223] The dialogical exhibition space inhabited by an (albeit small) plurality of artistic subjects, and notably curated by a plurality of subjects, defying individualism, signals a history of different formations of subjectivity that are informed by feminist theory and relationality.

Moving forwards in time, *documenta X* (1997), curated by curator Catherine David in Kassell is another exhibition of significance that has moved into the background since 2007. Although not known as a feminist documenta per se, it offered a view of the twentieth century not unlike *Inside the Visible*, by actively departing from a single linear narrative, instead reconstituting juxtapositions and fragmented historical practices around 'the articulations provided by four emblematic dates in contemporary history.'[224] The curatorial strategies of archival work and montage sought to 'suggest the complex relations between singular artworks and socio-political situations,' which again pinpoints relationality as an important theoretical condition for reading the contemporary 'otherwise.'[225] In the same year, curator Germano Celant directed the 47th Venice Biennale, titled *Future Present Past*, which also has temporally-experimental affinities with *documenta X* and *Inside the Visible.* My second case study investigates one national pavilion at this particular biennale in more detail, in the form of the exhibition *fluent* (1997), curated by Brenda L Croft and Hetti Perkins with Victoria Lynn. This marked the first time Aboriginal women represented Australia at the Venice Biennale. Through the extreme requirements of participating in the spectacle of Venice, by most accounts the exhibition effectively conveyed the depth of uncompromised relations across Aboriginal cultures that have not only survived historical colonialism, but the destructive impacts of ideologically-colonial art history. These exhibitions were no less political than the large-scale exhibitions following 2007, but they had a different ethos which has yet to find sustained articulation post-2007.

It is my proposal that these models for feminist-inflected exhibitions are subject to a kind of repression. To look back again to 2006, Pollock and Rowley wrote that the project of *Documenta 11*, directed by curator Okwui Enwezor, was profoundly feminist in the sense that it 'articulated unconsidered histories through untypical concepts of the historical accessed as the aesthetic as the site of particularity, singularity and affectivity.'[226] Even so, they argued, 'the acknowledgement of postcolonial feminism's (theory and practice) central role in structuring the ways we as producers, readers and curators think about art practices has been effectively 'disappeared': absorbed,

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[223] Heath, p. 31.

[224] Catherine David, 'Preface', in *documenta X* (Kassell: Documenta, 1997), pp. 24–25 (p. 24).

[225] David, p. 25.

[226] Pollock and Rowley, 'Now and Then: Feminism: Art and History. A Critical Response to Documenta XI', p. 1.

appropriated, exnominated as a player in the field of later twentieth century cultural debate.'[227] Against this seeming state of 'post-feminism' following *Inside the Visible*, how do we now read the ways de Zegher worked with relational modes of feminism and relational configurations of the feminine in the exhibition and catalogue? Like Pollock and Rowley's vision of an exnominated feminism, do the practices brought together by de Zegher lose their specificity as feminist, once other formats for 'feminist curating' and even 'feminist art' open up and preoccupy the discursive field? How will *fluent* be remembered, if at all? What are the places of each exhibition in collective memory, if they still do not register in the normative histories of exhibitions, curatorial studies and shifts in art history, but do also not necessarily register in the discourses around feminism and curating with the renewed focus on the mausealisation and depoliticisation of feminism, and non-Western but also non-Indigenous feminisms, activism, labour and biopolitics?[228]

A very important space for staking out a response to these questions emerges in curator and critic Helena Reckitt's chapter 'Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics' in the new compilation *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions* (2013), edited by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry. Reckitt traces a thread that connects feminist art practices in the 1970s with the early 1990s, uncovering a history of feminist relationality that has been written out of the current discourse by structural absences in relational aesthetics, although they have great affinity with the subsequent debates on biopolitics and affective labour. Reckitt begins with a reading of the work *Maintenance Art* by artist Mierle Laderman Ukeles, 'hidden in plain sight' in the major exhibition *c.7,500* (1973), curated by Lucy Lippard. Over two days Ukeles 'carried out banal cleaning and security tasks,' writes Reckitt, merging 'art's high cultural status with the lowly status of routine institutional maintenance.'[229] In her wider practice, Ukeles critiqued 'the modernist denial of maintenance labour' and politicised domestic work, at the same time linking it to 'the producing and sustaining human labour—the labour of creating life.'[230] Reckitt looks twenty years forward to artist Janine Antoni, who 'riffed on Ukeles' tribute to the low-down work of female domesticity' in her work *Loving Care* (1992), drawing attention to the politics of invisibility in male-dominated modernism. Reckitt proposes that in the act of cleaning the gallery floor with her hair, saturated with Loving Care dye, 'Antoni performed a link to ... pioneering [women] artists, an act of "loving care" that pays them their belated due.'[231]

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[227] Pollock and Rowley, 'Now and Then: Feminism: Art and History. A Critical Response to Documenta XI', p. 1.

[228] See for example the argument that *Inside the Visible* is anachronistic in Sue Malvern, 'Rethinking Inside the Visible', in *Politics in a glass case: feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 104–19.

[229] Helena Reckitt, 'Forgotten Relations: Feminist Artists and Relational Aesthetics', in *Politics in a glass case: feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions*, ed. by Angela Dimitrakaki and Lara Perry (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 131–56 (p. 131).

[230] Reckitt, p. 133.

[231] Reckitt, p. 134.

Reckitt locates Antoni's 'powerful yet vulnerable homage' in the early 1990s within a socio-political moment characterised more widely by a palpable anti-feminist backlash. For Reckitt this was compounded by the disavowal of feminism in curator Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics which emerged around the same time. Drawing on observations from 1993, 1994 and 1996, Bourriaud's essay collection *Esthétique Relationelle* was first published in 1998 in French, and in English in 2002. As stated in Chapter One, Bourriaud theorised a new paradigm in which 'the contemporary artwork's form is spreading out from its material form: it is a linking element, a principle of dynamic agglutination,'[232] emphasising the resistance of the social bond against the alienating and reifying effects of capitalism. For Reckitt, 'while Bourriaud championed key contemporary artists, he disregarded practitioners and movements from former eras,' which is especially problematic when it comes to the absence of feminism, 'given how closely Bourriaud's projects emulate forms of affective and immaterial work that have long been areas of female activity and feminist analysis.' In terms of feminism, Bourriaud's denial is ironic because the very issues that were central to relational aesthetics had been articulated by and within feminism previously, for example relations between sexed bodies and subjectivity, and the link between public performances of intimacy and collective action.[233] Reckitt also notes the resemblance between Bourriaud and the modes of contemporary capitalism: 'the conversational and interactive encounters envisaged by relational aesthetics reflect—perhaps too neatly—the Post-Fordist socio-economic era from which the trend emerged.'[234] The cooption of affective labour by capital, putting 'the full gamut of our communicative, imaginative and sociable resources to work,' lends itself to 'radically exploitative working conditions,' writes Reckitt.[235] She describes the extreme demands placed on artists in the field of contemporary art's production and consumption, often requiring that curators also constitute their identity according to the market's structures in order to survive. This is all symptomatic of the biopolitical turn, Reckitt explains, where even feminist collectives 'acknowledge that exploitation does not only come from the outside, but emerges when subjects participate in their own submission—processes of internalised surveillance and control that Foucault characterised as biopolitics.'[236]

From here, Reckitt returns to more recent performances of Ukeles and Antoni's works, examining how feminist curators have commissioned and re-presented pioneering work in an 'archival spirit of recovery.' She argues that 'by increasing and complicating public understanding of art that emerged from the women's movement, these exhibitions play a major role in resisting the amnesiac fate that has befallen feminist work at the hands of curators like Bourriaud.'[237] Reckitt then analyses feminist curatorial strategies and their effects for showing feminist work, particularly

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[232] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 21.
[233] Reckitt, p. 140.
[234] Reckitt, p. 142.
[235] Reckitt, pp. 142–3.
[236] Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality.*, trans. by Robert Hurley (London: Allen Lane, 1978).
[237] Reckitt, p. 147.

focussing on the social relations they reveal and conceal, before concluding with a critique of relational aesthetics emphasising the abstracting relativism of its form of institutional critique:

> Stripping socially-based art of its criticality and ambivalence, Bourriaud invites museum visitors to come together in what Jackson terms "a frictionless environment, unencumbered by the claims of responsibility."[238] An artistic appropriation of the everyday that denies its underlying politics, this framework suppresses the key feminist insight that neither "art" nor "work" are ever just that, but are always subject to conditions of who does what, for whom, and under what terms.[239]

Reckitt's analysis sharply illustrates the problematic effects provoked by Bourriaud in his dismissal of feminism in his theory of relational aesthetics: his theory comes to obscure the same kind of labour, politics and relational practices it seeks to evoke, and moreover comes to dangerously re-enact the same forms of socio-economic hegemony it seeks to critique. For feminist practices the familiar story is of being marginalised and silenced even while having played a formative role in the cultural sphere.

But there is another history emergent in Reckitt's chapter. Where Reckitt identifies the absence of responsibility to formative practices in Bourriaud, and contrasts these to the more historically-aware feminist artistic practices that acknowledge their feminist histories, might she be articulating a kind of feminist responsibility to past practitioners and their work? Reckitt writes that in the artistic act of cleaning the gallery floor with her hair, 'Antoni performed a link to ... pioneering [women] artists, an act of "loving care" that pays them their belated due.' Such an act of loving care, or a manifestation of responsibility, might also be understood as a relation, a thread or a line that Reckitt traces back from Antoni's first performance in 1992 to Ukeles' first performance in 1973.

In the early 1990s, Reckitt recalls, there was a strong culture of anti-feminism, which clearly informs Bourriaud and his selectively-relational theory. But at the same time, Antoni's act of loving care towards Ukeles, I would argue, is one of several relational acts and even practices (re)emerging in the early to mid-1990s. Through my research I have found that relational forms of feminism are not uncommon in this moment, even as they are eclipsed by fierce or indifferent disavowals of feminism's significance. For example, *Inside the Visible* (1996) was on the walls before *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) was even published. Sometimes feminist-inflected relational practices like the many artistic practices that featured in this landmark exhibition, and the practice of its curator Catherine de Zegher, were misread as not feminist at all. Bracha L Ettinger's contemporaneous theorisation of Matrixial trans-subjectivity, for example, which posited a relational form of the feminine with implications for wider social relations and cultural practice, has been largely circumvented by the feminist literature and therefore subjected to a form of repression. This might be because Matrixial trans-subjectivity, and other contemporaneous relational practices, do not necessarily resemble the forms of feminism that were so stridently being disavowed, which largely operated at the level of the political statement.

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[238] Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
[239] Reckitt, p. 152.

Another reason for the ambiguous status of these relational practices, especially following 2007, is that as the discourse turns towards biopolitics and affective labour, forms of relationality are seen to be complicit with capitalism. As Helena Reckitt argues, capitalism adopts, compromises and encompasses relations and relational modes of living and working.[240] Supporting this view, in 2012, Lara Perry presented 'Feminist Networks in the art museum: Inclusion, expansion and overidentification,' a paper for the workshop *Feminist Curatorial Practices* at the Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths University of London.[241] The workshop was part of the program for the annual project *All My Independent Women,* organised by artist/curator Carla Cruz.[242] In her paper Perry reflected on Reckitt's chapter and proposed that relational curatorial practices, particularly the 'curated network,' similar to the feminist collectives identified by Reckitt,

> …[M]ay not in fact represent a feminist 'other' to the typical practices of the dominant masculinised art museum - in fact they are its mirror image. They do, within their feminist communities, what museum curators do in their largely non-feminist ones.[243]

The conflation of these two forms of practice is very clear to see. But I would pose the question of what other realms of meaning emerge from feminist curatorial practices that are not contained by these terms of analysis. This is not by any means to negate Reckitt, Perry and Dimitrakaki's important and necessary critiques, but to also open a space for theories, experiences and knowledge which are not entirely appropriated by capital in order to consider what might be potentially overlooked. There might be an ethical basis to enabling other forms of analysis, even a responsibility or an act of care.

Ethics, and in particular feminist ethics, has been the central discourse articulating forms of feminist relationality in the mid-1990s. The theoretical models offered by feminist ethics are frequently relational themselves, providing a new set of tools to clarify the activity of the early-mid 1990s, including care, responsibility and relationality. This turn has repercussions for how curatorial subjectivity is configured in both normative curatorial studies and also recent feminism and curating discourse. In particular this confluence challenges the de-historicised and independent curatorial subject, embodied for example by Bourriaud even as he nominally blurs the boundaries between artist, viewer and curator, and to borrow Hernández-Navarro's term, the 'deresponsibilised' curatorial subject who is produced by, and contributes to, a culture of de-ethicisation. Feminist ethics and interdisciplinary elaborations of its key concepts also offer ways of rereading the feminist critique of curating in capitalism.

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[240] Reckitt, pp. 142–143.

[241] For the record there are important differences between collectives, networks and other relational modes, which may be partially hidden in some discussions.

[242] In this paper, Perry also offered her own taxonomy of recent intersections of feminisms and curating which contested the homogeneity of the 'feminist exhibition' model, and included the form of the 'curated feminist network,' using the example of *All My Independent Women* which has grown from Cruz's own networks, see http://allmyindependentwomen.blogspot.co.uk/ .

[243] Lara Perry, 'Feminist Networks in the Art Museum: Inclusion, Expansion and Overidentification' (presented at the All My Independent Women, Women's Art Library, Goldsmiths University of London, 2012), p. 6 <http://amiw2012.blogspot.co.uk/>.

Feminist ethics

Feminist ethics largely began as an intervention into the unacknowledged masculine bias of normative ethics in the 1980s in the UK and North America, although, like feminist interventions in art's histories, the genealogies and temporalities structuring the historicization of the field have been contested and rewritten.[244] Nevertheless, one key intervention, widely regarded as the first, focussed on *care* as the locus of a misrecognised and under-developed mode of ethics particular to women and girls.[245] Care is, therefore, the first major concept in feminist ethics. The second is relationality because it emerges repeatedly in models of subjectivity, agency and ethical understanding, particularly around the early to mid-1990s. I explore how each of these concepts interlink with my research below, along the following lines: their history/genealogy within feminist ethics and then their development into interdisciplinary concepts; followed by contestations.

Care

The ethical concept of care was first fully-elaborated in the landmark feminist text *In A Different Voice* (1982), by ethicist and psychologist Carol Gilligan. Based on her reflections on the recurrent problems and absences in the interpretation of women's psychological and moral development, Gilligan aimed to 'connect these problems to the repeated exclusion of women from the critical theory-building studies of psychological research.'[246] She questioned the universal applicability and effects of Lawrence Kohlberg's studies of moral reasoning in men, which drew on Kantian and Rawlsian liberal theories of ethics.[247] Like art historian Linda Nochlin in 1973 thinking about women artists' relationship to the concept of greatness, Gilligan was not satisfied by a biologically-determined lack of capacity for moral reasoning as an explanation of the different type of data produced by her study:

> The disparity between women's experience and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, has generally been seen to signify a problem in women's development. Instead, the failure of women to fit existing models of human growth may point to a problem in the representation, a limitation about the conception of the human condition, an omission of certain truths of life.[248]

Gilligan considered inherent limits in the traditional normative ethics of justice and rights, developed by Immanuel Kant, John Locke and later John Rawls, which are based on the rationality and agency of independent moral agents. She detected different formations of morality in women, and suggested a way of thinking about ethics that addressed the unrecognisability of certain moral agents

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[244] Alison M Jaggar, 'Feminist Ethics: An Introduction', *Forum: A Women's Studies Periodical*, 16 (1991), n.pag.

[245] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice* (London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[246] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 1–2.

[247] Claudia Card, 'Women's Voices and Ethical Ideals: Must We Mean What We Say?', *Ethics*, 99 (1988), 125–36 (p. 126).

[248] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, pp. 1–2.

in these earlier frameworks, for instance those in relationships defined by care. Earlier in 1980, Gilligan had written,

> The qualities deemed necessary for adulthood—the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision making, and responsible action—are those associated with masculinity but considered undesirable as attributes of the feminine self. The stereotypes suggest a splitting of love and work that relegates the expressive capacities necessary for the latter reside in the masculine domain. Yet, looked at from a different perspective, these stereotypes reflect a conception of adulthood that is itself out of balance, favouring the separateness of the individual self over its connection to others and leaning more toward an autonomous life of work than toward the interdependence of love and care. [249]

Gilligan posited a fundamental difference in women and men's moral reasoning, which led to criticism from within feminist theoretical communities for failing to address the conditions that might produce such differences;[250] and for perpetuating an ethics in which women's morality is not fully articulated in the light of a long history of political subordination.[251] In 1993, professor of political science Joan C Tronto argued against the essentialist conception of care as a gender-specific capability in her book *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care*. She argued that the concept of 'women's morality' as an ethic of 'care and nurturance, mothers' love... and the overriding value of peace' had unifying and exclusionary implications.[252] Tronto also critiqued the notion in Western thought of politics as a domain largely unfettered by morality. She posited instead that care needs to be re-conceived in a political context, indicating the possibilities of a more intimately-theorised link between politics and ethics which is still yet to be fully elaborated.[253] At the conference *Critical Care: advancing an ethic of care in theory and practice* (2012), keynote speaker and professor of social policy Marian Barnes highlighted the need for a renewed understanding of 'care as a political resource and as a political process' if it is to have an impact on social policy and survive neo-liberalism which devalues care.[254] The same may apply to a curatorial concept of care which must be recast as a political resource and a political process if it is to have any purchase in current conceptions of curating or the institutionalisation of ethical subjectivity and agency.

Looking to the more recent interdisciplinary life of the concept of care, feminist ethicists Chris Beasley and Carol Bacchi comment that care is 'increasingly invoked as one of the major "languages" for recasting community and sociality.'[255] They note its expansion into other fields beyond feminist

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[249] Carol Gilligan, 'In a Different Voice: Women's Conceptions of Self and Morality', in *The Future of Difference*, ed. by Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jordan (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1980), pp. 274–317 (p. 275).

[250] Seyla Benhabib, 'From Identity Politics to Social Feminism: A Plea for the 1990s' (Philosophy of Education, 1994) <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/eps/PES-Yearbook/94_docs/BENHABIB.HTM>.

[251] Card.

[252] Joan C Tronto, *Moral Boundaries: A Political Argument for an Ethic of Care* (New York, NY. [u.a.: Routledge, 1993), p. 1.

[253] Tronto.

[254] Marian Barnes, 'Struggling For, With and Against Care' (presented at *Critical care: advancing an ethic of care in theory and practice*, University of Brighton, 2012) <https://student.brighton.ac.uk/videos/newvideos.php?ID=1606>.

[255] Beasley and Bacchi, p. 49.

ethics, for instance, the work of 'political philosophers (for example, in discussions of radical phenomenology in Young; Davis; Odysseos), as well as in the works of postmodern (Levinas; Bauman), sexuality (Weeks) and post-colonial theorists (Hage)' among many others from social welfare to bioethics.[256] Against this diverse and expanded field, it seems only possible to address the key sites of resistance to care within and outside feminist ethics that relate most directly to the proposed curatorial ethic of care.

Contestations of care

One major setback to the politicisation of the concept of care, Beasley and Bacchi argue, is the risk of excessive abstraction which can reinstate the authenticity of the Other: 'If we wish to imagine an interconnected and just community (whether national or international), we might need to think again.'[257] They write,

> In our view, no matter how sharply cognisant of the requirement to destabilise us/them distinctions, care ethics writings rest upon an asymmetry that threatens to return such distinctions under the name of deeply felt compassion and open-hearted generosity. The emphasis on feelings (for the other) rather than on notions of dispassionate impartial moral 'justice' invokes an apparently self-evident authenticity that may precisely make this re-mobilisation of us/them distinctions more difficult to recognise and challenge.[258]

Care is vulnerable to being generalised to the point of counter-productivity and even contradiction, reproducing and re-inscribing a homogenous notion of the other. For example, Hilde Hein argues that 'museums could be tantalising sites of reconciliation where contrast and discord join in a protected environment that cultivates sympathy and reflection.'[259] If such an aim were to invoke care specifically, the question would need to be asked whether sympathy and reflection are always desirable or appropriate responses for museums or exhibitions to evoke. Care should therefore be elaborated in close relation to real life examples and contexts of curatorial practice.

Related contestations of care come from the disability rights movement. Marian Barnes points towards three key voices. Activist Richard Wood declared that care has been a tool to dominate disabled people, much like activist and professor Peter Beresford who stated that the experience of receiving care has been one of domination and oppression: 'The term care has exceeded its sell-by date. It is undermined by its association with inequality and discrimination.'[260] Barnes reflects that for many, the term cannot be retrieved from these negative associations. In her keynote she quoted sociologist Tom Shakespeare: 'care is a word that is value-laden, contested, and confused. Particularly in the way it combines an emotional component and a description of basic human services.'[261]

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[256] Beasley and Bacchi, p. 49.

[257] Beasley and Bacchi, p. 50.

[258] Beasley and Bacchi, p. 59.

[259] Hilde Stern Hein, 'Redressing the Museum in Feminist Theory', *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 22 (2007), 29–42 (p. 38) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09647770701264846>.

[260] Peter Beresford, 'What Future for Care?' (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2008), p. 1 <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/2290.pdf>.

[261] Tom Shakespeare, *Help: Imagining Welfare* (Birmingham, England: Venture Press, 2000).

The parallel with Aboriginal histories in Australia is striking, where care signifies particularly violent histories of institutionalisation and paternalism, which were tools of state-enforced genocide where Aboriginal populations were systematically attacked with the aim of dissolution based on theories of eugenics and social Darwinism.[262] Paternalism arguably continues today in the form of the 'Stronger Futures' legislation (2011) which extended the Northern Territory Emergency Response or the Northern Territory Intervention. Initially introduced by the Howard government in 2007 to address suspected child abuse, one source explains that 'the measures are widely opposed by Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, who say they were not properly consulted on the government's plans and that the laws are racist.'[263] A feminist and counter-colonial ethic of curatorial care has to be responsive to the risks of paternalism, of inflicting 'care' on communities including artists and curators for whom it might be read as an imposition or yet another form of control. Instead care should be grounded in Indigenous conceptions of empowerment and self-determination, and be highly responsive to Indigenous knowledge, modes of practice, whether theoretical or creative or otherwise, and political positions. There are protocols and research ethics guidelines for research with Indigenous participants which I consulted to plan and carry out my research on the practice of Brenda L Croft.[264] De Zegher also has her own ethos of not dominating artists or artworks which stems from her own articulation of care. I return to these points in the case studies.

The next line of resistance against care comes from a different angle. From a sociological perspective on healthcare, care has been dismissed and devalued as women's work, servants' and slaves' work, playing a role in the oppression of dominant groups over others. We can see this as part of the oppression of Indigenous people, especially women and girls, historically in Australia, as well as women and girls in other colonial contexts.[265] As Marian Barnes notes, drawing on Tronto,

> The disdain of others who do care has been virulent in our culture. This dismissal is inextricably bound up with an attempt to deny the importance of care. Those who are powerful are unwilling to admit their dependence upon those who care for them. To treat care as shabby and unimportant helps to maintain the positions of the powerful over those who do care for them. To resist or devalue care reinforces the discursive power of independence as a state to be promoted and valued, in contrast to interdependence and dependence, both of which are considered to denigrate those to whom they are applied. We have to ask who that benefits.[266]

This recalls Helena Reckitt's study of 'maintenance work' and domestic responsibilities that have played an invisible yet vital role in supporting not only the patriarchy but the progressive Left

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[262] 'Australia's Eugenic Heritage', *Radio National*, 2007 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/rearvision/australias-eugenic-heritage/3244372> [accessed 22 November 2013].

[263] 'Factbox: The "Stronger Futures" Legislation', *News* <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2012/06/20/factbox-stronger-futures-legislation> [accessed 10 November 2013].

[264] See Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS, 2006).

[265] Bonnie G. Smith, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Women in World History: 4 Volume Set* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

[266] Barnes.

historically. As Reckitt wrote, care has formed a large component of the immaterial labour that upholds patriarchal capitalism. The connection to curating is complex: on the one hand, while curating as a profession enjoys a relatively high cultural status, it is often low-paid or voluntary. Angela Dimitrakaki has developed an analysis of the professionalisation of curating as the systematic production of a workforce that is characterised by feminisation.[267] On the other hand, as she describes, 'the right of American women to enter the well-paid job market is effectively exercised on the backs of underpaid migrant women working as nannies and domestic servants, often leaving behind their own children,'[268] which also applies to some contemporary women curators.[269] Not all women curators have the financial resources for such support however, or subscribe to the hierarchies of the free market that shape the organisation of labour, because of the costs and implications for other groups of women or Indigenous peoples who step into such roles, for example. Dimitrakaki's point about curatorial labour is that it is an effect of capitalism that oppresses most women, rather than a form of care that needs revaluing.

The form of care I focus on in the thesis is not solely as philosopher Margaret Urban Walker explained 'caring labors' in 1998, which 'include administering to the needs of young and old, sick and dying, frail and dependent, as well as securing and reproducing through paid and unpaid labor many basic conditions of life for legions of fully abled persons.'[270] The division of labour and gendered experiences of care remain absolutely central to a feminist conception of care in curatorial practice wherever they arise in practice. I also aim to highlight care, however, as it has been conceived at the most general level by philosophers Berenice Fisher and Joan Tronto in 1990: 'a species activity that includes everything we do to maintain, continue, and repair our "world" so that we can live in it as well as possible.'[271]

This foregrounds a set of questions relating to my proposal for a curatorial ethic of care that is also feminist: without losing sight of the new trajectories in feminism and curating discourse, how else might care be understood than immaterial labour? Is it inevitable that curatorial care is always co-opted by capitalism, or are there ways it might resist domination and repression? Following Fisher and Tronto in 1990s, how else might it be articulated and what might this contribute to the theory and practice of curating, but also current directions of feminism?

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[267] See for example Dimitrakaki, 'Feminist Politics and Institutional Critiques: Imagining a Curatorial Commons.' See also a study of gender ratios in curatorial studies programs at http://www.bard.edu/ccs/redhook/survey-on-gender-ratios-in-curating-programs/

[268] Dimitrakaki, 'Feminist Politics and Insitituional Critiques: Imagining a Curatorial Commons', p. 23.

[269] For example Linda Nochlin revealed that in her lifetime she had hired domestic labourers so she could continue to participate in the paid workforce. Linda Nochlin, 'Response' (presented at *The Granddaughters' Generation: Feminism and Art History Now*, University College London, 2011).

[270] Margaret Urban Walker, *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 78.

[271] Berenice Fisher and Joan C Tronto, 'Toward a Feminist Theory of Caring', in *Circles of Care*, ed. by N Abel and N Nelson (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990), pp. 36–54.

Relationality

The wider field of feminist ethics has been characterised by a focus on relationality since its early manifestations. Carol Gilligan was among the first to pose relational forms of moral reasoning and understanding as distinct from the autonomy of normative ethics. Historian of philosophy Claudia Card shows the connection with care:

> Women with care perspectives define the self as embedded in relationships, while men with justice perspectives conceive the self as ideally autonomous. Women's relationships tend to be networks, weblike; men tend to form hierarchies. Where women see conflicts of responsibilities, men see conflicts of rights. Women resolve conflicts by seeking to include everyone, while men compete, rank, or take turns.[272]

These definitions of self or subjectivity are at the centre of relational configurations of ethics. Feminist theorist Eva Feder Kittay wrote in 2005,

> Within the theoretical literature and political life of the Western industrialized nations, at least, we are captives of the myth of the independent, unembodied subject—not born, not developing, not ill, not disabled and never growing old—that dominates our thinking about matters of justice and questions of policy.[273]

One elaborate feminist model of relational ethics was proposed in the key text *Moral Understandings: A Feminist Study in Ethics* (1998) by feminist philosopher Margaret Urban Walker. Here Walker conducted a critique of normative and prescriptive ethics, traditional frameworks for the study of morality that have at their core a rational agent who positions himself outside an accessible and determinate moral reality. She coined the term 'theoretico-judicial model' to describe the template for organising moral inquiry into the pursuit of this kind of moral theory.[274] Walker explained,

> The project of codifying a compact core of unsituated, purely moral knowledge fuses a number of tendencies in twentieth-century moral philosophy. It tends to be intellectualist in seating morality primarily in some central, specifically moral, beliefs, and rationalist in assuming that the central moral beliefs are to be understood and tested primarily by reflection on concepts and logical analysis of the relations of evidential support among moral beliefs. The project is individualist in its assumption that the central moral concepts and premises are to equip each moral agent with a guidance system he or she can use to decide upon a life or its parts... at the same time, this approach is impersonal; the right equipment tells one what is right to do (or explains why something is right to do) no matter who one might happen to be and what individual life one is living, no matter what form of social life one inhabits and one's station within it.[275]

> Walker explained that this

> Unilateral individual, yet impersonal, action-guidance is believed possible because morality is seen as socially modular: if there is a timeless, contextless, pure core of moral knowledge, differences between forms of social life and differences among the positions one may occupy

[272] Card, p. 127.

[273] Eva Feder Kittay, 'Dependency, Difference and the Global Ethic of Longterm Care', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, 13 (2005), 443–69 (p. 445).

[274] Walker, p. 7.

[275] Walker, p. 8.

within them can only provide occasions for different applications of core or essential moral knowledge which itself remains the same. But it could only be the same, modular with respect to the rest of social life, if it is the nature of core moral knowledge to transcend culture, history, and material conditions, both individual, and shared.[276]

She proposed a shift instead towards an 'expressive collaborative model,' which approaches morality as situated, relational, and consisting in practices. 'In the case of ethics, systematic and very general thinking about morality is often presented as if it were the discovery or uncovering of what morality itself actually is,' whereas 'a conception of morality as itself theory-like or apt for compact propositional codification is installed by excluding most of what morality might consist in as a socially and psychologically real dimension of human life.'[277] The 'expressive collaborative model' promotes a localised view of ethics in practice that disallows abstraction and prevents moralising, or one kind of moral experience coming to stand in for all possible formulations of morality.

In Walker's ethical framework, responsibility is the measure of morality, or ethical practice, because it is what constitutes the relations between people or subjects. As Walker explains, the way to 'get at moral content' of social relationships is by 'tracking' responsibility. In 1998 she developed this view as 'an investigation of morality as a socially embodied medium of mutual understanding and negotiation between people over their responsibility for things open to human care and response.'[278] To think back to the field of curatorial studies, Hernández-Navarro posed that relational curatorial ethics is characterised by only three responsibilities (the institution, the artwork and the public), as explored at the start of this chapter. Walker's ethical model of relational embeddedness allows for a more nuanced and pluralised relational ethic of care in curatorial practice. Curators might position themselves, and/or find themselves positioned, at multi-layered intersections of responsibilities to others that may change, or be constant. These may include responsibilities to artists, to a particular politics, to artists' politics, to motherhood or care-giving, to their own community/ies, to artists' community/ies, and so on. As I have already argued, I do not think this list is endless, but it needs to remain an open question to avoid premature foreclosure.[279] The field in which curators work, primarily contemporary art, its institutions and so on, but also this expanded field of responsibilities must therefore be recast in analysis as an ethical field in which the curator participates and in whose ethical subjectivity is produced relationally.

Contestations of relationality

In 1997, care ethicist Jean Keller examined the disparities between care ethics and moral philosophy that emphasises justice and autonomy, and considered the implications for feminist ethics:

> At the same time that care ethics has been criticized for not sufficiently safeguarding women's autonomy, the relational model of moral agency found in care ethics has been used to criticize

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[276] Walker, p. 9.

[277] Walker, p. 15.

[278] Walker, p. 9.

[279] The multiply-positioned relational ethical subject would not slot neatly into existing codes of ethics which prompts the question of how usable documents might meet and negotiate other ethical frameworks.

the philosophical tradition for exalting an individualistic conception of autonomy that is attained at the cost of denying our relations with others.[280]

The competing feminist aims of holding onto women's autonomy on the one hand, and the relationality of their subjectivity on the other, translates into the conversation about curators. How can curators, especially feminist curators, be acknowledged as practicing with full autonomy and all it entails, at the same time as be recognised as relationally-positioned? Autonomy brings recognition, support, a distinct voice, a level of authority and power, an identity and reputation and so on, all necessary for individuals to practice as curators in material terms, and to have any purchase on discourse. As seen in Reckitt's text, relational practices that trouble autonomy are vulnerable to real effacement not just because of the ideologically 'post-feminist' agenda of the 1990s, but because structurally, artistic 'maintenance work' questions and plays with the effects of invisibility. This is also the case for curatorial practices that focus on that which is not immediately visible.

Keller reviews the main tensions between relationality and autonomy, and concludes, 'not only does the problem of autonomy require a rethinking of care ethics; care ethics requires that we rethink our received conception of autonomy.'[281] She proposes that autonomy be reconceived as a dialogical process and an intersubjective activity. Keller uses the example of a care-giver who engages discussion and shared reflection with a friend to 'help the agent make decisions that are more autonomous, for her friend might help her see, and weigh the relative merits of, options she might not have otherwise considered.'[282] The limits of Keller's argument are defined by the field in which she intervenes, in this case the formation of moral subjectivity at the social level. The exhibitions I research focus on the social but also deeper levels of relationality; psychic, affective and cultural. Keller's argument is still significant for a curatorial form of relationality because it prompts the question of how curatorial and artistic autonomy might require relationality as a structural condition and vice versa. The dynamic between the two must be a significant consideration for a relational curatorial ethic of care.

Methods of analysis

Having offered a review of literature focussing on the ethical where it emerges in the field, I shall now explain the structure of the thesis and its methods of analysis.

Case studies

The structure of this thesis negotiates the ideas outlined above, and works to move beyond critique, to activate an ethic of coexistence and relationality in the practice of curating. The case studies centre on two curators' practices as a way of organising inquiry, but also as a strategy to acknowledge their distinct identities, career paths, cultural locatedness and respective agency as

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[280] Jean Keller, 'Autonomy, Relationality and Feminist Ethics', *Hypatia*, 12 (1997), 152–64 (p. 155).
[281] For more detail see the text. Keller, p. 161.
[282] Keller, p. 161.

individuals. The case studies also centre on particular exhibitions to facilitate inquiry into moments and events which permits the elaboration of each curator's practice in a specific historical and socio-political context. Crucially, the two case studies are not structured as a comparison, which would potentially risk hierarchies based on geography and culture. Instead the pair of case studies is designed to maximise in-depth investigation without reinforcing the curator as *auteur*. Furthermore, relations between the exhibitions and curators' respective practices are detected *across* the thesis. Originally three case studies were planned, but as I accumulated archival material for the second, I realised there was no need to stretch to a third to evidence a pattern of a curatorial practice of care across time and space, and that this structure may in fact impair the project's depth of inquiry. The two case studies enable a more detailed analysis, and give rise to their own related examples of curatorial and other practices of care. I introduce the case studies through each chapter immediately following the section below.

Modes of reading

The thesis develops modes of reading that are grounded in four key concepts: the archive, feminism as an open and as-yet-unknown project, archaeology and ideology.

In 1969, Foucault problematised the monolithic concept of the historical archive. He wrote,

Instead of seeing, on the great mythical book of history, lines of words that translate visible characters' thoughts that were formed in some other time and place, we have the density of discursive practices, systems that establish statements as events (with their own conditions and domain of appearance) and things (with their own possibility and field of use). They are all these systems of statements (whether events or things) that I propose to call *archive*.[283]

In 2001, writing in a context related to my own field (the artistic production of the B/black and Asian diaspora), cultural theorist Stuart Hall stated, 'constituting an archive represents a significant moment, on which we need to reflect with care.'[284] He explained,

It occurs at that moment when a relatively random collection of works, whose movement appears simply to be propelled from one creative production to the next, is at the point of becoming something more ordered and considered: an object of reflection and debate. The moment of the archive represents the end of a certain kind of creative innocence, and the beginning of a new stage of self-consciousness, of self-reflexivity...[285]

Using Foucault's challenge to the concept of the archive as an inert collection of historical material that is self-evidently important, Hall posed an analysis of the 'living archive,' firstly as having a pre-history in the form of a set of conditions that determines an object. To connect this to feminisms and curating, I have established the determining conditions of this field, namely feminist interventions in art's histories, and geographically and temporally dispersed reflexive exhibition practices. Historical records and contestations of these have intentionally been preserved and

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[283] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 145.
[284] Stuart Hall, 'Constituting an Archive', *Third Text*, 15 (2001), 89–92 (p. 89)
    <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528820108576903>.
[285] Hall, p. 89.

(re)assembled at various points in space and time, constituting an archive of feminist curatorial practices. Following Foucault, Hall established that the archive is,

> [M]arked by rupture, significant breaks, transformations, new and unpredicted departures. The trick seems to be not to try to describe it as if it were the *oeuvre* of a mythical collective subject, but in terms of what sense or regularity we can discover in its very *dispersion.*[286]

Hall wrote secondly the archive is 'living', which 'means present, on-going, continuing, unfinished, open-ended.'[287] The project of constituting an archive of feminism and curating is in process, not only because feminist curatorial strategies and effects are continually subject to experimentation, troubling and reassessment, or even because Brenda L Croft and Catherine de Zegher are living curators who are practicing in the present, offering new reflections and insights into their practice in the mid-1990s.

In 2007 Griselda Pollock wrote that the major feminist challenge to the museum and archive not only involves critically interrogating patriarchical and phallocentric systems but also positing the creative work of feminist projects: 'As such, *feminist* itself marks the virtual and perpetual becoming of what is not yet actual. It is a *poïesis* of the future, not a simple programme of corrective demands.'[288] Because feminist curatorial practices have at their core a constant movement towards a feminist future, which might well be pluralised, the expanded archive of feminism and curating is always in a dynamic state that cannot be fixed. Feminist coordinates and conditions can be pinpointed but not with a guarantee of universality and timelessness.

Foucault's concept of archaeology means to read for formations that structure discursive practices, including the archive. In 1969 Foucault wrote that archaeology does not treat discourse as transparent or a sign of something else, or 'as an ideal, continuous, smooth text that runs beneath the multiplicity of contradictions.'[289] Instead Foucault proposed, 'archaeological comparison does not have a unifying but a diversifying, effect.'[290] Therefore both constituting (and/or contributing to) the archive of feminism and curating, as well as undertaking an archaeological reading, means not simply assembling and surveying historical material and interpreting it to reveal a latent truth. In the case studies I gather together archival material relating to the respective curatorial practices and exhibitions, and read across their statements for ethicality and a relational concept of care, not defined by an a priori meaning but as emerging in relation to structures sometimes inconsistently and always localised and differentiated. Relationality in Brenda Croft's practice has culturally-specific Indigenous meanings that are different from relationality in Catherine de Zegher's practice as a curatorial strategy, but nevertheless there are non-assimilable affinities that can be detected via close reading.

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[286] Hall, p. 90.

[287] Hall, p. 89.

[288] Griselda Pollock, 'What the Graces Made Me Do... Time, Space and the Archive. Questions of Feminist Method', in *Encounters in the Virtual Feminist Museum: Time, space and the archive.* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 9–25 (p. 10).

[289] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 171.

[290] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, p. 177.

Another reason why the archive is not immediately knowable to its readers is posited by a psychoanalytic inflection of the practice of art history. In *The Virtual Feminist Museum* in 2007, Pollock wrote that by Foucault and Freud,

> [We] have been taught that we must read the archives... Beyond what we can monitor in ourselves is the unconscious, always at work, itself an inaccessible but active archive, both highly personalised because of each individual's singular and historical trajectory through the processes of formation as a subject and culturally structural as the insertion of the laws of culture and language into the heart of each subject...[291]

Psychoanalysis poses the interiority of subjects. Thus archaeology is significant for methodologically negotiating the work of curators whose subjectivity must also have an interior. Pollock wrote in 2006, 'the terms prehistory, sedimented layers, and temporal strata evoke what has been frequently noted as "the archaeological metaphor" that is deeply embedded in Freudian psychoanalysis.'[292] I do not offer a psychoanalytic reading of curatorial practice *per se*, but take the psychoanalytic possibility in feminist theorisations of art history as grounds on which to present symptomatic readings in the case studies, where curatorial practice and the exhibitions as emergent in the archive reveal certain clues that evidence deeper shifts that are not pre-defined, but are nevertheless both singular and formed by wider structures at the psycho-symbolic level.

Lastly, symptomatic reading refers also to literary critic Pierre Macherey's concept of ideology, posed in 1978. This was informed by Louis Althusser's concept of the ideological as 'a non-unitary complex of social practices and systems of representation that have political consequences,'[293] rather than any unified and singular ideology. Macherey put forward the idea that ideology works in the structural absences of a given text, without regarding the text as deficient or lacking the full means to explain itself. Rather, Macherey argued that reading across a text symptomatically, looking for its determining conditions, shows 'how it is composed from a real diversity of elements that give it substance.'[294] The archival records of the exhibitions and curatorial practices in the case studies that I assemble into an archive are therefore understood as traces, not to be taken at face value but as visible or legible only in relation to that which is invisible, unsaid or excluded, structuring the exhibition as a readable text. My analysis accordingly focuses on the complexities and processes of theorisation, conceptualisation and engagement with politics in terms of curatorial strategies, especially where these inform and take shape in procedures of selection of artists and works, and the organisation of knowledge. The analysis also focuses on the effects of each exhibition in terms of political and cultural impact, evidenced by critical reception and subsequent shifts in discourse. The thesis does not aim therefore to conduct close readings of the installations themselves. While more formal and

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[291] Pollock, 'What the Graces Made Me Do... Time, Space and the Archive. Questions of Feminist Method', p. 12.

[292] Griselda Pollock, *Psychoanalysis and the Image: Transdisciplinary Perspectives on Subjectivity, Sexual Difference, and Aesthetics* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2006), p. 5.

[293] Althusser, p. 253.

[294] Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. by Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), p. 49.

aesthetic modes of analysis are not denied space or significance, the nature of my contribution is to enrich the historiography of curatorial practice and exhibition histories by attending to the entangled complexities—discursive, ideological and cultural—of exhibitions and curatorial practice.

Part One presents the first case study, the curatorial practice of Catherine de Zegher and the exhibition *Inside the Visible* (1996). Chapter Three explores the development of de Zegher's practice over the span of her career, and *Inside the Visible* through the archive, which is read for patterns of responsibility and acts of care. Chapter Four considers the exhibition as a widely-recognised feminist intervention, which may function as an instance of curatorial ethicality if it is not further subjected to contemporary repression in the literature. Part Two presents the second case study, the curatorial practice of Brenda L Croft and the co-curators of *fluent* in the Australian Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale (1997). Chapter Five maps the development of Croft's practice, and through a reading of the archive presents *fluent* as a demonstrably effective intervention into the globalised art world. In this chapter responsibility and care are also framed broadly in relation to a specifically Indigenous conception of shared values, which is largely characterised in terms of relationality. This helps me read for more culturally specific forms of relational ethicality. Chapter Six considers the significance of Indigenous women's participation in Venice, and the precarity of *fluent*'s position in the recent discourse on contemporaneity. Its almost total neglect in the literature threatens the exhibition's efficacy, which against the wider repression of the relationality of Indigenous cultural practices has arguably destructive effects. Finally, the Conclusion reflects on the research process and the proposed way of reading developed across the case studies and the thesis, which ultimately is argued to have re-inscribed an ethical concept of care in the fabric of curatorial practice, potentially contributing to breaking the cycle of repression and marginalisation.

Part One

Chapter Three. Catherine de Zegher's curatorial practice and *Inside the Visible* (1996)

In 1996, Catherine de Zegher curated the exhibition *Inside the Visible,* which was first fully realised at the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, before travelling internationally. This exhibition and its curatorial practice form the focus of Part One, the first case study. *Inside the Visible* gathered together the work of thirty seven women artists from key moments in the twentieth century, framing them conceptually in ways that actively avoided the sidelining, essentialising or effacement of difference, but in ways attentive to its effects in psychic structures and specific socio-political circumstances. As a feminist intervention, *Inside the Visible* counteracted normative art historical practices, at the same time that it offered a response to contemporaneous feminist practices. In this chapter, I present an account of de Zegher's career over the span of her practice, and then read through the exhibition's archive and catalogue to map its politics, strategies and effects. At the same time I read for instances of relationality and the distribution and formation of responsibilities, which are considered in more depth in the next chapter in relation to an ethics of care.

Catherine de Zegher as curatorial subject

Catherine de Zegher is an independent curator. Her career path was not, however, directed towards curating from the beginning. In March, 2010 and then again in October, 2011, I interviewed de Zegher about how her practice has changed over time. The resulting material forms the basis of the career overview that follows, along with de Zegher's Curriculum Vitae and other sources in the public domain.[295]

De Zegher was born in 1955 in the Netherlands and grew up in Belgium. She studied history of art and archaeology at Masters level, and during the summer holidays, took the opportunity to work on archaeological digs in Europe. One dig was in Thorikos, a mining town in mainland Greece that had provided Athens with silver in Mycenaean times.[296] De Zegher explained in the 2011 interview that she took part in the excavations herself, 'digging, in the earth. It was very labour intensive.'[297] De Zegher took two things through her career from these early experiences. The first was the reading of traces in space, and the second was the reading of layers in time, or stratigraphy. She explained, 'you get a very complex set of information, out of which you extract all the possible readings.'[298] When I

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[295] Katie Deepwell and Catherine de Zegher, 'Interview with Catherine de Zegher', *n.paradoxa*, 1996, n.pag; Catherine de Zegher, 'Catherine de Zegher', *October*, 2008, 180–84.

[296] Z. A. Stos-Gale and N. H. Gale, 'The Sources of Mycenaean Silver and Lead', *Journal of Field Archaeology*, 9 (1982), 467–85 <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/529683>.

[297] Catherine de Zegher and Sibyl Fisher, Reflections on Catherine de Zegher's Career / Biography, 2011.

[298] de Zegher and Fisher.

suggested this was both conceptual and practical, she emphasised: 'It's very practical. You dig, you really dig! And clean everything nicely so you can see the traces.'[299]

From 1982-1987, de Zegher worked for the Provincial Department of National Heritage, Bruges, which involved archaeological and archival research on historical monuments in West Flanders. After working on an inventory of wattle and daub houses, de Zegher did excavations on castles and sometimes churches. 'I was involved in the restoration of all these interiors ... trying to get back to the 17th the 16th century,' she said, 'and I found the oldest remains, which were very often glass, ceramics. It was really nice.'[300] While in Greece, there were few written records aside from writing on pottery and epitaphs on graves, whereas in Flanders there were more written records which formed part of the archive. For de Zegher, her readings had a hypothetical feel, because there was 'no feedback in the contemporary.'[301]

As de Zegher expanded into industrial archaeology, working on factory buildings in Flanders, she happened to work on the renovation of the Kanaal building in Kortrijk. As a result, de Zegher was invited to become part of the new Kanaal Art Foundation (founded 1985) located there, which offered residencies to artists. This was the centre for contemporary art which de Zegher would come to direct from 1987-1998. Initially, de Zegher's work there was very practical. '[B]ecause I was the only woman, all the tasks came to me!' she told me, laughing. 'I was the only female board member, so I took care of the others. I fed them, I put them up in my house. I had them stay for months in the house.'[302] Since she was taking on these responsibilities anyway, along with raising three children, de Zegher decided to stop the other work, and work full-time with the artists. She noted how different it was to be able to interact with living artists, where feedback and conversation about their work was possible. The experience in archaeology and art history had, however, provided groundwork for being able to 'read the present.'[303]

While at Kanaal, de Zegher produced international projects with emerging and established artists. She worked with Cildo Miereles (Mexico) and Tadashi Kamawata (Japan) among others, and decided that working with artists was what she wanted to do. Although the Kanaal was a non-profit venture offering a very small salary, de Zegher enjoyed it: 'it was like digging all over again, on the surface but doing all the work. I would go around with the artist, try to find their materials. But we had a very good time together.'[304]

In 1990, de Zegher was invited by the Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp, to co-curate with Paul Vandenbroeck the exhibition *America Bride of the Sun: 500 Years of Latin America and the Low*

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[299] de Zegher and Fisher.

[300] de Zegher and Fisher.

[301] de Zegher and Fisher.

[302] We can make a connection to feminist ethics here which has highlighted caring labour as gendered work; I return to this in the next chapter. de Zegher and Fisher.

[303] de Zegher and Fisher.

[304] de Zegher and Fisher.

Countries (1992). This was a major event organised to celebrate 500 years of contact between Latin America and the Low Countries. Vandenbroeck took on the fifteenth-nineteenth centuries, while de Zegher focussed on the twentieth century, and twenty three contemporary art projects by South American artists. This responsibility was profound for de Zegher: her encounters at Kanaal with artists from South America had already oriented her sense of being positioned relationally in a highly politicised art world. De Zegher had begun to see that she could potentially exhibit South American artists within a neo-colonial trope of heroic discovery, playing off the exotic appeal of peripheral 'Others'. Instead, she avoided the role of missionary, and began to experiment with curatorial strategies that would undermine the deeply problematic celebratory remit of the exhibition.[305] The experience encouraged de Zegher's interest in the postcolonial.[306]

De Zegher continued her work at Kanaal, and gradually built up the budget. A breakthrough took the form of the Cultural Ambassadors of Flanders, an initiative that provided funding for projects related to Flanders. De Zegher conceptualised the exhibitions of artists' work she had been developing in relation to béguinages, which are medieval secular convents peculiar to the Low Countries. Because they are 'a very Flemish institution', de Zegher obtained funding for the *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine in Flanders* project (1994-5). This was the earlier manifestation of *Inside the Visible* (1996). De Zegher describes this first incarnation as a series of double solo exhibitions that gradually unfolded over the period of a year.[307]

Up until this point in de Zegher's sphere of reference, curating as an independent practice, beyond the care of collections, did not yet have extensive traction or the elaborated definition it does now. In our 2011 interview, de Zegher explained:

CDZ: I started at the *Béguinage*: one artist, two artists at a time, very hands on. One on the ground floor, one on the floor above, so I was working very much alone. I had one assistant who came once in a while, and together with the artists who were themselves very hands on— all women, not demanding at all, very helpful— we pulled it off! And I turned it, with the grant we got, into this big exhibition.

SF: Did you have, in those early days at the béguinage, a sense of yourself as a professional curator?

CDZ: No.

SF: Is that a very recent development?

CDZ: Yes, very recent. Not at all. No, the word didn't even exist. I just felt like a facilitator, like somebody who helped. I was just like a coordinator between the industry and the art. I was all the time thinking how can I bring them together. Yeah it was absolutely, the word didn't exist at the time!

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[305] Deepwell and de Zegher, p. n.pag.

[306] The exhibition was not consistently understood as a postcolonial intervention in the critical literature, see Papastergiadis.

[307] For a more detailed analysis of *béguinages*, and the exhibition project, see *Beginnings. Begin the Béguines in Flanders*, below.

De Zegher's insights here show that curating as an independent practice in the field of contemporary art, especially working with contemporary artists, has taken shape in the lifetime of a current generation of curators.

While still Director of Kanaal Art Foundation, De Zegher joined advisory boards and panels of several major arts initiatives and in 1996 was Visiting Curator at The Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, for *Inside the Visible* which was awarded Second Prize for Best Show by the International Association of Art Critics.[308] In 1997, de Zegher was Commissioner of the Belgian Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale, incidentally the same year in which Croft was joint Commissioner of the Australian Pavilion with the exhibition *fluent*, my second case study. De Zegher also became Executive Editor of October Books, MIT Press in New York, owing to her growing experience writing and publishing books for Kanaal, giving papers at international conferences, and holding positions of increasing responsibility.

In 1998, de Zegher left Kanaal and became Executive Director and Chief Curator of The Drawing Center, an independent art space in New York, and oversaw altogether 66 exhibitions there.[309] In 2006, de Zegher resigned on principle following media controversy with regard to censorship related to the relocation of the institution to Ground Zero. The Drawing Center together with the proposed International Freedom Center was moving to the site, but the Drawing Center was the target of an ideologically-motivated attack, in which its ethos was accused of being unpatriotic.[310] Art historian Carol Armstrong and theorist Judith Butler publicly defended de Zegher's vision for the institution.[311]

In 2007, de Zegher was Visiting Curator at the Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto. Here she continued to instate her principles of collaborative participation by working with artists Kara Walker and Giuseppe Penone, and the curator Gerald McMaster to re-install the gallery's permanent collection, once again drawing on her post-colonial and feminist interests in theorising difference. From 2008-9, de Zegher was Director of Exhibitions and Publications at the Art Gallery of Ontario.

From 2008-2010 de Zegher was Guest Curator in the Department of Drawings at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, organising the major survey *On Line: Drawing Through the Twentieth Century* with Cornelia Butler, and was Visiting Curator at the Tàpies Foundation in Barcelona where she curated a double show: *Alma Matrix: Shared Traces. Bracha Ettinger and Ria Verhaeghe* which coincided with *Eva Hesse: Studioworks*. In each of these instances, de Zegher has stated her aims to work on equal terms with artists, continually emphasising the benefits of reciprocity and relationality.[312]

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[308] Catherine de Zegher to Catherine Lampert, WAG/EXH/2/466/4.

[309] For examples see *Past Exhibitions* page at http://www.drawingcenter.org/exh_past.cfm

[310] de Zegher, 'Catherine de Zegher'.

[311] Judith Butler, 'Commemoration And/or Critique? Catherine de Zegher and the Drawing Center', *Text zur Kunst*, 16 (2006); Carol Armstrong, 'Back to the Drawing Board', *Artforum International*, 2006, 133–34.

[312] Catherine de Zegher, Sibyl Fisher and Rachael Theobald, Masterclass Interviews, 2010.

De Zegher's next major project was devising a creative vision for the 18th Biennale of Sydney (2012), as Joint Artistic Director alongside curator Gerald McMaster. The exhibition concept *all our relations* examined relationality in numerous contexts including international Indigenous cultures:

> In the arts, as elsewhere, analytical reflection has led to an understanding that human beings are highly dependent upon our often overlooked relationships with others and with our common world. While this connective model is still embedded in a few societies, established western cultural patterns have tended to emphasise the fragmentation and isolation of the individual. As a result, there are relatively few remaining models of participatory forms of perception and sensibility. A reciprocal relation calls for a profound re-evaluation and the development of new models of working together within our changing reality. One of the things that art can do is to allow us a space for such attention – for thinking together that is open-ended.[313]

Most recently, de Zegher was Commissioner of the Australian Pavilion at the 55th Venice Biennale (2013), where she curated *Here Art Grows on Trees,* an exhibition of work by Simryn Gill (Singapore/ Malaysia/ Australia). De Zegher was also Curator the 5th Moscow Biennale (2013).

Inside the Visible: A descriptive analysis

I shall now offer a descriptive analysis of the exhibition through the archive, in order to present its detail and particularities, and investigate the manifestation of relationality, care and responsibility and feminist interventions.

Exhibition title and concept

The exhibition *Inside the Visible* resists being captured in a single tag line, concept or summary. In a reflective discussion with the art historian Katy Deepwell, de Zegher later insisted that 'the exhibition is not reducible to one thesis... it is more than a single perspective.'[314] This is because the exhibition framed works by women in the twentieth century not in terms of essential difference, but through positing the 'feminine' as a psycho-symbolic position that destabilises and investigates the relationships between difference, text, language and signification; transgression, hybridity and the body; and subjectivity.

The full title of the exhibition is *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of, and from, the feminine*. While the purpose of any exhibition title is typically to 'capture the essence' of an exhibition, the full title of *Inside the Visible* is deliberately multi-faceted.[315] The title relates to the poetic lines that appear on the first page of the catalogue— 'inside the visible / impulse of the possible'— by artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña, born in Chile.

In the 1960s, Vicuña began making transient work outdoors, in small assemblages of found materials including fragments of driftwood, stones, feathers, herbs, thin sticks, wire, shells, bone and

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[313] Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster, 'All Our Relations', in *18th Biennale of Sydney: all our relations*, ed. by Catherine de Zegher and Gerald McMaster (Sydney: The Biennale of Sydney Ltd, 2012), p. 49.

[314] Deepwell and de Zegher, p. n.pag.

[315] Lynda Kelly, 'What's In a Name? Evaluation of Exhibition Titles', *Visitor Behaviour*, 12 (1997), 32 (p. 32).

thread (Figure 1).[316] She has called this work *precario,* from the Latin *precarious* which is derived from *precis* or prayer. For Vicuña *precario* suggests 'uncertain, exposed to hazards, insecure... precarious in history, they will leave no trace. The history of art written in the North includes nothing of the South. Thus they speak in prayer, precariously.'[317] In *Inside the Visible'*s catalogue, de Zegher wrote that 'Vicuna dwells in im/possibility... She demands a laying open of the mechanism that produces meaning: the formation of a language. Her ideal is a discourse characterised by plurality, the open interplay of elements, and the possibility of infinite recombination.'[318]

> In an email, de Zegher explained the exchange with Vicuña for the exhibition title:

> For the title, I was playing with the words "inside" and "insight," and from there with "sight" and "seeing" and, in this way, I came to "seen" and "(art)scene" and then to "visible" and the work of women being "invisible"... Consequently, I started to think of "inside the visible" and spoke about it with Cecilia, who liked it a lot and said she had worked on a poem "impulse of the possible" and how she saw the two as connected, and this is how the poetic lines came about: half mine, half hers...[319]

Inside the Visible therefore suggests a relationship between interiority, visibility and possibility. Most clearly there is a play on the oppositions visible/invisible, possible/impossible and inside/outside. This make reference to Cartesian dualisms that have underpinned modern Western thought, and its critical aftermath, potentially spanning multiple theoretical sites from deconstruction as work to reveal binary oppositions as inherently predicated on relationality rather than mutual exclusivity; to phenomenology which emphasises subjective experience.[320] Generally the playful crossover of terms, each taken from a pair, does not quite make sense at first, registering the exhibition's approach to art that is not 'rational' in the sense of immediately corresponding to Enlightenment or modern Western rationality. De Zegher has explained the possible relationship between the terms: 'what seems at first invisible becomes visible, and what seems impossible becomes possible when enough attention is given'.[321] This emphasises the idea of change and flux, rather than fixity and eternal oppositionality. De Zegher has also suggested, 'artists are interested in what is not immediately visible', which suggests a long or deep temporality of practicing and looking, and a departure from self-evidence as reliability, the measure of knowledge or experience. De Zegher has also highlighted the increasing awareness and understanding of art by women: 'where it seemed impossible that women artists would get attention and recognition, with time and work, there is transformation and change.'[322] *Inside the Visible* therefore asks questions of the inevitability of the

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[316] Although the exhibition title partly comes out of a relation with Vicuña's practice, I do not show her artwork at this early point in my analysis because no one artwork 'illustrates' the exhibition.

[317] Catherine de Zegher, 'Cecilia Vicuna's Ouvrage: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 346–57 (p. 349).

[318] de Zegher, 'Cecilia Vicuna's Ouvrage: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots', p. 356.

[319] Catherine de Zegher, 'Re: A Few Questions', 11 July 2011.

[320] Again too numerous to list but see for example *The Philosophy of the Body: Rejections of Cartesian Dualism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1970).

[321] Catherine de Zegher, 'Re: Hello', 14 October 2010.

[322] de Zegher, 'Re: Hello'.

invisibility of women in disciplinary and discursive institutions; questions that are also socio-political, in the sense of querying the absence of women artists in the status quo, and ethical, in the sense of responsiveness to the other who is overlooked, marginalised, repressed.

The next component of the title, 'an elliptical traverse of twentieth century art' signals a distinctive approach to the time frame in the history of art that is usually designated as modernism. The dominant linear narrative in art history constructs modernism as a series of progressions, a story of key nations, periods, movements and individual artists.[323] De Zegher wrote in the catalogue,

> That which does not fit [into this art historical schema] has too often been dismissed, delayed, or rendered invisible by the privileged terms of hegemonic elites whose existence is nevertheless predicated on this eclipse of difference. One aim of this exhibition is to break down such polarities, allowing the perturbing, the dissenting, the dangerous, the repressed, to reemerge...[324]

'Elliptical traverse' suggests instead a conceptual or curatorial method that departs from traditional methods. The etymology of 'elliptical' directs us towards 'ellipse', which describes a type of curve in mathematics.[325] The Latin form *'ellipsis'* describes 'the omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction or fully to express the sense; an instance of such omission,' or *in* the more specific sense of punctuation*, 'formerly used as the name of the dash (—) employed in writing or printing to indicate the omission of letters in a word.'[326] The *Oxford English Dictionary* provides an example of this usage in 1795: 'an Ellipsis...is also used, when some letters in a word, or some words in a verse, are omitted; as, 'The k—ng', for 'the king...'[327] 'Elliptical' to describe adjectivally a curatorial method therefore plays on in/visibility and omission, while the 'curve' aspect is distinctly different from a straight line which may visualise the more traditional linear progression of 'modernism' as a single art historical narrative. 'Traverse' is defined as 'across; crosswise; athwart; transversely,' which suggests a method of reading in against the grain, which in temporal terms travels from start to finish, or from then to now, and in spatial terms from there to here.[328] 'An elliptical traverse of the twentieth century' therefore suggests reading across the twentieth century with a focus on that which has been omitted, rethinking art from and in relation to the historical field not as progression or succession, but as a field of potential connections within moments and across spaces, without background or periphery.

The final component of the title, 'in, of, and from, the feminine' again signals a different approach, this time to women and sexual difference. The curator eschews and distances the exhibition from pre-determined concepts like 'women's art', 'feminist art' or 'a feminine aesthetic'. For some

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[323] Gombrich.

[324] de Zegher, *Inside the Visible*, p. 21.

[325] 'Ellipse, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/60523> [accessed 25 October 2013].

[326] 'Ellipsis, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/60527#eid5651806> [accessed 25 October 2013].

[327] 'Ellipsis, N.'

[328] 'Traverse, Adv. and Prep.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/205282> [accessed 25 October 2013].

working in the cultural field/s of feminism these represent significant paradigms for strategic purposes, but De Zegher explained in the catalogue that *Inside the Visible* asked 'if it is possible to think "difference" without naming it and subsuming it under reductive and totalising systems of thought (naming the Other: that is, identifying, classifying, separating and fixing alterity).'[329] The phrase 'in, of, and from, the feminine' instead offers a renewed understanding of work made by women: not as fundamentally different from, or the same as, work made by men in the twentieth century, but as produced within systems that centralise and privilege 'man' and therefore related to difference as a structural mechanism, but not contained or defined by it. Griselda Pollock stated in her introductory text 'Inscriptions in the feminine' in the exhibition catalogue,

> As if deciphering an ancient culture whose language is lost while its strange monuments remain to puzzle and provoke our curiosity, we must assume that we do not yet know what is being traced upon the surfaces of culture by artists speaking in, from, or of the feminine.[330]

Pollock's specific phrasing in this text led de Zegher to use the final phrase in the exhibition's title, because it elucidates the feminine as a position from, of or within which artists have worked in the twentieth century, which is not immediately self-evident or recognisable. Because of this, it requires a deeper looking and rethinking to decipher inscriptions which nevertheless remain registered in the cultural and historical field. Such traces and inscriptions suggest the co-ordinates of the elliptical traverse.

Looking further back, the feminine is a concept with a history of shifting meanings. Pollock explains in her catalogue introduction that women were 'denied access to social and political subjecthood, condemned to intellectual pauperism' in the nineteenth century, hence their work was over-determined as 'feminine' as a way of excluding it from collective consciousness.[331] In the twentieth century, the situation came to reverse; women's participation in modernism (as the cultural negotiation of modernisation) required the complete disavowal of difference in order to identify with absolute values that initially seemed to offer freedom from the prior constraints of femininity, but transpired to be hegemonically masculine. [332] In this framework, women's art was therefore *other*. Pollock wrote,

> These contradictions never stopped the women producing in any of the moments or movements of twentieth-century modernism and beyond, but they have progressively ensured the invisibility of women artists in the consolidated narratives and celebratory exhibitions that canonized an institutional and later an academic history of modern art. *Inside the Visible* challenges that invisibility by proposing to excavate a feminist genealogy of twentieth-century artists who are women, creating other chains of association and dialogues across time and space that frame and examine the contradictions of sexual difference and cultural positioning.[333]

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[329] de Zegher, *Inside the Visible*, p. 21.
[330] Griselda Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 66–87 (p. 74).
[331] Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 67.
[332] Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 68.
[333] Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 69.

De Zegher leads the reader into the catalogue with three epigraphs drawn from psychoanalysis, which reveal women's experiences and feminist re-readings of hegemonic conceptions of the feminine in terms of psycho-symbolic structures, against the negative construction of the feminine as lack or nothingness in the twentieth century. De Zegher did this to trace the subject folded into visibility. The first epigraph is a quotation from the text 'Womanliness as a Masquerade' (1929) by psychoanalyst Joan Rivière:

> Womanliness therefore could be assumed and worn as a mask, both to hide the possession of masculinity and to avert the reprisals expected if she was found to possess it—much as a thief will turn out his pockets and ask to be searched to prove that he has not the stolen goods. The reader may now ask how I define womanliness or where I draw the line between genuine womanliness and the "masquerade." My suggestion is not, however, that there is any such difference: whether radical or superficial, they are the same thing.[334]

Rivière proposed women's participation in public or intellectual life requires that they identify with masculinity, with added pressure to divert attention from this transgression by assuming 'womanliness' as a mask or masquerade. In 1988 John Fletcher wrote,

> Rivière's distinction comes down to the mask of femininity as reaction-formation, renouncing and reversing wishes, and the mask of femininity covering the refusal to renounce them. In both cases it is the same mask. It is precisely in relation to the norm that she invokes the... conception of womanliness as a mask...[335]

Fletcher's re-reading of Rivière later in the twentieth century showed that there was imaginative possibility in the concept of womanliness as masquerade in the form of a 'transgressive doubleness and an inscription of alternative wishes' in Rivière's 'version of femininity,'[336] because it subverted the Lacanian and normative conception of the feminine as lack and non-identity. In *Inside the Visible,* Rivière finds a place in the epigraphs because her text reveals that in her moment, the 1920s, the feminine was not entirely conceived as a complete absence.

The second epigraph is Julia Kristeva's statement from 1974, 'I would call "feminine" the moment of rupture and negativity that conditions the newness of any practice.'[337] Kristeva's account of sexual difference is dialectical, where the feminine is positioned as a structural negativity with potential for transgression and innovation. Kristeva's notion of the feminine as a rupture and negativity is already embedded in feminist inflected art historical discourse, which expands how potentiality arises in the cultural field. In an article for *Studio International,* titled 'Negative Capability as a Practice in Women's Art' (1976), French art critic and writer Anne-Marie Sauzeau-Boetti explained,

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[334] de Zegher, *Inside the Visible*.

[335] John Fletcher, 'Versions of Masquerade', *Screen*, 23 (1988), 43–69 (p. 54).

[336] John Fletcher, p. 55.

[337] Kristeva cited in Anne-Marie Sauzeu-Boetti, 'Negative Capability as a Practice in Women's Art', *Studio International*, 191 (1976), 24–25 (p. 25).

The actual creative project of woman as a subject involves BETRAYING the expressive mechanisms of culture in order to express herself through the break, within the gaps between the systematic spaces of artistic language.[338]

The feminine in this schema is creative because it betrays and transforms the conditions of its own production which force it into invisibility by privileging and normalising the masculine. But like Rivière in the 1920s, this epigraph shows how in the 1970s the feminine as theorised against its mainstream disavowal did have potential, but not yet the means to locate specificity *not* in relation to the masculine or the dominant psycho-symbolic order.

The third epigraph quotation is from psychoanalyst and artist Bracha L Ettinger from 1995, an explanation of the concept of the Matrix that she has developed in her practice since the 1990s:

The matrix is a feminine unconscious space of simultaneous co-emergence and co-fading of the I and the stranger that is neither fused nor rejected. Links between several joint partial subjects co-emerging in differentiation in rapports-without-relating, and connections with their hybrid objects, produce/interlace "woman" that is not confined to the contours of the one-body with its inside versus outside polarity, and indicate a sexual difference based on webbing of links and not on essence or negation.[339]

The Matrix is a psycho-symbolic signifier that uses the logic of severality that characterizes the joint space of the pre-natal and pre-maternal in the later stages of pregnancy to supplement the phallogocentric order that negatively positions the feminine. The Matrix represents a resolution of the risks of the negative condition of the feminine that Rivière and Kristeva's passages both implicate. In Rivière the feminine found form, but at the same time it did not allow the feminine subject specificity or distinctiveness unto herself because it was superficial, and still constituted in relation to the masculine. In Kristeva, the feminine has creative potential because it is positioned negatively, and through rupture can subvert its own positioning. This allowed the feminine capacity for transgression and innovation, but again only by relation to the masculine.

Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrix reformulates a space that accommodates several partial subjects that co-exist and co-affect, without reverting to negativity which is predicated on a positive/negative dualism, and/or invoking the Phallic psycho-symbolic order. In fact, Ettinger's explorations further questions fixity, delineation and borders in themselves.[340] Because the Matrix offers a way of thinking about the feminine with its own specificity, not reliant on, or confined in a relation to Phallic logic or oppositionality, this third epigraph registers a generative way of rethinking the feminine relationally in the exhibition's own time.

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[338] Sauzeu-Boetti, p. 25.

[339] Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, 'The With-In-Visible Screen', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 87–113.

[340] Judith Butler, 'Disturbance and Dispersal in the Visual Field', in *Art as Compassion: Bracha L. Ettinger*, ed. by Catherine de Zegher and Griselda Pollock (MER. Paper Kunsthalle: ASA Publishers, 2011), pp. 149–65 (pp. 149–165).

The feminine subject, plotted through the epigraphs, has been configured relationally throughout the twentieth century, so relationality is not new in the mid-1990s. In earlier moments however, the relationally-constituted feminine could only exist by a relationship of confinement and denial (as in Rivière) or through overcoming and betrayal of the dominant order (as in Kristeva). In Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrix, however, the feminine re-emerges as relational, not in a negative relationship to the masculine or sexual difference, but with a capacity for productive and generative transformation in the form of trans-subjectivity. Ettinger suggests that relations in the feminine are proto-ethical rather than 'ethical', because ethicality requires distinctive subjects who are wholly formed: in order to enter into an ethical relationship, subjects must recognise the other as distinct from themselves. In the space of the Matrixial, however, subjects are partial because they are not yet fully-formed or wholly distinctive. They co-exist in a dynamic relation of co-emergence and co-fading. But the Matrix can be understood as a metaphor or a resource for thinking about ethicality with extensive resonance for the field of cultural production. I explore this further in the next chapter.

Exhibition structure

De Zegher's curatorial choices in 1995-6 regarding content, structure, layout and display were highly-theorised, already the product of an expanding intellectual practice: the 1996 incarnation of *Inside the Visible* had its roots in the 1994-5 *Begin the Béguine* project, its precedent in terms of experimental curating of work by women artists in light of historical repression and re-openings, and participatory collaborations between artist/s and curator. I explore this connection further on in the chapter.

In *Inside the Visible* (1996), the three moments from which the catalogue epigraphs are drawn, 1929, 1974 and 1995, each correspond to the historical periods around which the featured works of art were selected. These were the 1930s-40s, the 1960s-70s, and the 1990s; key periods in the twentieth century that can be thought of as 'heightened times of crisis', in which women artists negotiated particularly repressive politics: respectively, historical fascism in pre-war Europe, upheaval post-1968 and dictatorships in South America, and institutionalised conservatism and racism in Europe and North America. This focuses the exhibition on the artwork of thirty seven international women artists[341] who worked within different historical formations of repressive conditions, but whose work for the curator 'often feature similar material processes that address alterity.'[342] At the time, many of

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[341] The selected artists were Louise Bourgeois, Claude Cahun, Emily Carr, Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, Lygia Clark, Hanne Darboven, Lili Dujourie, Ellen Gallagher, Gego, Mona Hatoum, Nathalie Hervieux, Eva Hesse, Susan Hiller, Hannah Höch, Ann Veronica Janssens, Katarzyna Kobro, Yayoi Kusama, Bracha L Ettinger, Anna Maria Maiolino, Agnes Martin, Ana Mendieta, Avis Newman, Carol Rama, Martha Rosler, Charlotte Salomon, Mira Schendel, Lynn Silverman, Nancy Spero, Jana Sterbak, Sophie Tauber-Arp, Nadine Tasseel, Ana Torfs, Joëlle Tuerlinckx, Cecilia Vicuña, Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, Carrie Mae Weems and Francesca Woodman.

[342] de Zegher, *Inside the Visible*, p. 21.

the artists were relatively unknown in Western art centres, although now they are more widely known and celebrated.[343]

The historical and political crises, wars and revolutions that these moments registered were not presented as curated sections in themselves, nor did they work their way into the exhibition's title. De Zegher posited four open-ended themes that gathered together artworks from each of the moments, which prevented historical events from over-determining possible readings of the works. The 'themes' were 'Parts of/for', 'The Blank in the Page', 'The Weaving of Water and Words' and '*Enjambment*: "la donna è mobile"'. De Zegher explained that while the four sections of the exhibition were structurally useful, they were not intended to fix artworks into categories, but rather to solicit 'other connections and unaccustomed juxtapositions [...] the exhibition as an event should be transitory; it should be neither an answer nor a fixed statement but rather a spectrum of activities that offers different perspectives, a set of relationships, a discussion, a dialogue without canon'.[344] In this way, the curator did not assume sole responsibility for didactically explaining the exhibition's 'essence,' but developed an open yet grounded curatorial framework.

'Parts of/for', listed first in the catalogue, can be understood in terms of its two component phrases. De Zegher explains in the introduction to the catalogue that 'parts of' refers to 'the fragmentation and dismembering of the fetishised and above all silenced woman as sign', while 'parts for' refers to 'the actions assigned to woman as performer in the theatre of/or life'.[345] The curator selected artworks that ambiguously parodied, reproduced or challenged the construction of racial and sexual difference, directly addressing the politics inherent in systems of signification. They raised 'questions of the body as commodity, institutional display, industrial obsession, and machinic fragmentation, but also about colonialism, world war, and military mutilation'.[346] This section raises the question of women's representation and the political. The curatorial framing of the works in this section therefore operates on a highly visible level; it is not transparent, seeking to reveal an objective truth about art by women. Instead it brings representational potential itself into focus as a device. In a presentation on *Inside the Visible* in 2010, de Zegher explained of the section 'Parts of/for',

> I felt like women were playing a role. And this whole idea of having a role set for you in life, or one you had to respond to as a woman, was a way that was dismantled by these women artists. And also it was dismantled by the way that they were working with parts of the body. They were completely dividing up the body.[347]

De Zegher referred to North American artist Martha Rosler's artwork *Vital Statistics* to explain this point, because the artist was 'tearing things apart... the body is measured and put into

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[343] 'Lesser known but highly influential artists' are said to include Claude Cahun, Lygia Clark, Jana Sterbak and Mona Hatoum. '*Inside the Visible* Media Plan' (National Museum of Women in the Arts, 1996).

[344] Catherine de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 19–41 (p. 36).

[345] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 24.

[346] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 25.

[347] Catherine de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study' (presented at the Catherine de Zegher Masterclass, School of Fine Art, History of Art and Cultural Studies, University of Leeds, 2011).

categories.'[348] De Zegher saw a clear link with Nazi medical experiments and eugenics, and events in concentration camps, the historical significance of which was compounded by the rise of neo-fascism in Belgium in the 1990s. She articulated her own specific position in relation to the fascist or fascistic approach to the body by commenting:

> I was trying to understand how can I play a role in dismantling this on a very deep level. And a lot of these women have worked that way. Maybe not consciously, but by showing why certain people, certain things in society, are seen as abject... and [the] abject is such a construct.[349]

In these reflections, de Zegher explains her sense of wanting to challenge particular ways of thinking and reasoning whose casualties are 'people and certain things' that are thus discarded, made to seem irregular and repulsive. Curatorially, this indicates a responsibility for shifting deep-seated ideologies, taking the opportunity to care for 'people and things' constructed as abject.

The second theme listed in the catalogue, 'The Blank in the Page' alludes to a feminine and radical poetics of alterity in language play. De Zegher writes that whether through drawing or writing, the tracing of the blank sheet is the beginning act of symbolising the self and its reality. While coming-into-language or mark-making define and empower the self however, language 'also deidentifies the self since strangeness/otherness of the self occurs as soon as it is constructed, outside the self, as soon as it is symbolised'.[350] This section draws on poststructuralist explorations in psychoanalysis and semiotics and makes an explicit connection with the feminine in artistic practice. It focuses on the feminine as a positioning in language and sexual difference that perhaps all artists inhabit or come into contact with. In a presentation in 2010, de Zegher explained 'The Blank in the Page' in a different way:

> [It's] very much about the fear of the blank page when you start to write, or when you start to draw, or start to paint, it's this very scary, empty space. And then once you break that anxiety, and you start to get into language, not only written language but also into visual language, that there is a possibility to understand more and more.[351]

De Zegher used Charlotte Salomon's work, *Leben? oder Theater*? (1940-42) (Figure 3) as an example:

> She tried to understand a history of her family, of her parents, of her mother and her grandmother, there was a whole history there of suicides, which is something that happened a lot, before the war, during the war, and after the war in Jewish families.[352]

De Zegher then continued explain, 'it's amazing that when you work that way, things come to you. It's like when you open yourself to... um, certain ideas, they also come to you from others.'[353] This seems to focus on the possibilities that come about when someone sees themself in relation to other people, or to 'others'. This explores the feminine as a subjective position that is relationally-

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[348] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.
[349] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.
[350] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 27.
[351] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.
[352] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.
[353] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

constituted. In terms de Zegher's own way of working, this line of thinking shows an openness to different stories, experiences, and points of view. It reflects de Zegher's own reluctance to cast herself as a/the *source* of knowledge, and iterates her commitment to relational forms of working and thinking. De Zegher has several times voiced her enthusiasm for Shoshana Felman's comment that 'knowledge is not a substance but a structural dynamic which is essentially dialogic.'[354]

'The Weaving of Water and Words' is the third theme of the exhibition, and directs the viewer and reader's attention towards the fluid interrelatedness of language, alterity and space. De Zegher prompts readings of the relevant artworks by identifying material processes that engage or are informed by particular debates within cultural politics or art historical discourse, for example the weaving grid and nature in works by Agnes Martin (Canada, USA) and Gego (Germany, Venezuela), who correspond with the 1960s-70s moment. This section allows material resonances to arise between works which each at the same time respond to localised historical circumstances. By directing the viewer's search for meaning towards the intersection of language, space and alterity, this curatorial gesture reveals a responsibility towards opening up the possibilities of artworks to function in ways that are not predetermined but are nevertheless grounded, rather than delimiting the work of art by explaining conclusively what they mean or represent. This configures relationality and ethics in a specific way: the 'other' of the ethical relationship may be understood as the artwork or object, which is framed by the curator as relating to its own historical, cultural and socio-political conditions of production in certain ways, at the same time as relating to its own and related works' form, not as a vehicle for transmitting a pre-set meaning, or distinct from its function, but as *materiality*, its very physicality, tangibility and/or visibility which interweaves together with its possible readings.

Furthermore, this section's title derives from Cecilia Vicuña's book *Unravelling Words and the Weaving of Water* (1992). Because there is a specific reference to Vicuña's practice, ethicality surfaces in the artist's sense of weaving as caring. De Zegher identifies this in her chapter on Vicuña in the catalogue: 'according to Vicuña, caring and weaving fuse in naming: to care and to carry, to bear children, to bear a name.'[355] This also reveals weaving as a relational practice which is generative, 'in the feminine.' Elsewhere Vicuña has explained the artistic form *quipu* (or *khipu*) as '*knot* in Quechua, ancient Andean "script" or "writing" with knotted cords, used for oral poetry, storytelling, accounting and maintenance of communal rights and responsibilities,' which can be read as literally forming or in-forming ethicality.[356]

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[354] Catherine de Zegher, 'Introduction', in *Women Artists at the Millennium*, ed. by M. Catherine de Zegher and Carol Armstrong, October Books (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2006), pp. xv–xx (p. xviii); Catherine de Zegher, 'Catherine de Zegher' (presented at the The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007).

[355] de Zegher, 'Cecilia Vicuna's Ouvrage: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots', p. 348.

[356] Cecilia Vicuña, 'El Quipu Menstrual: What Is a Quipu?', *Cecilia Vicuña*, 2013 <http://www.ceciliavicuna.org/en_quipu.htm>.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Please see *Inside the Visible* catalogue for image

Figure 1. *Con-con* by Cecilia Vicuña, 1967. Mixed media. Courtesy the artist.

Weaving is also an ethical practice in the politicised sense of caring for the survival of culture in resistance to colonialism:

> Women in Latin America transform alien objects, influences, materials, and ideas in purposeful collages, as they adopt multivocal aesthetics to indigenous cultures. The textiles are thus active texts that play out the ongoing intercultural dialogue of self-determination and cultural hegemony, as well as the dialogue of exchange between conservatism and innovation, continuity and transmutation.[357]

The fourth and final section, '*Enjambment*: "La donna è mobile"' is a play on the operatic phrase 'the lady is fickle', which read against the grain alludes to flexibility or nimbleness of thought.[358] De Zegher writes, 'art as not simply visual but as an integration of many effects of the embodied mind, incorporating rhythm, light, sound, smell, and spatiality, enable an encounter in which art's material presence resonates with the body and its reminiscences'.[359] This makes reference to French theorist Helene Cixous' concept of *écriture féminine*, in which women inscribe their bodily specificity, and Kristeva's notion of *jouissance,* or unnameable pleasure. These contravene the abstracting methods of art history and refocus on materiality and corporeality. De Zegher said of '*Enjambment*: "La donna è mobile"' in her 2010 presentation,

> I was trying to define how some women artists were encouraging mobility, and movement, and joy. And there was nothing wrong with having *jouissance*, joy for life, you know, movement and change and mobility, and everything that came with it. It's also about moving around the work of art, but I didn't want to see it in a Cubist way, you know, you think, there must be other ways. And you know a lot of these women artists were interested in dance. And how you move

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[357] de Zegher, 'Cecilia Vicuna's Ouvrage: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots', pp. 350–351.
[358] This phrase is from Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro*.
[359] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 32.

around a sculpture and then you see it from all different angles. And how in life, one should try to see things from different angles. And from different positions.[360]

The comment about avoiding a Cubist frame of reference again evidences a desire to move beyond existing art historical categories and narratives, and to explore other possibilities. The whole focus of this section on change, movement and joy also encourages a different way of experiencing artworks and being in an exhibition space. Rather than producing a perhaps static atmosphere of serious contemplation, de Zegher was trying create a more dynamic space in the temporary exhibition that allowed for more physical and spontaneous engagement with artworks. Figure 2 is an installation shot of this section's manifestation in the exhibition space.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Please see *Inside the Visible* catalogue for image

Figure 2. Installation shot of '*Enjambment*: "La donna è mobile"', *Inside the Visible*, NMWA, Washington, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center. Artworks (left) *Composition* by Maria Helena Vieira da Silva, 1936. Oil on canvas. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Centro de Arte Moderna Jose de Azredo Perdigao, Lisbon, Portugal; (far right) *Collage à éléments d'objets* by Sophie Taeuber-Arp, 1938. Collage. Stiftgung Hans Art und Sophie Taeuber-Arp, e.V., Rolandseck, Germany.

In one way, it is possible to see from this archival photograph the section's aim to prompt engagement and transformative encounters with the artworks because they are lit carefully and spaced generously, which allows them to take focus. In a general way the photograph shows the exhibition space looking similar to other exhibitions: it does not immediately look radically different from a 'white cube' space, but contemplative and quiet with curatorial text kept to a minimum. As a lasting record of *Inside the Visible*, the photographic material in the archive fixes a very partial view of the works on display, radically different from the spontaneous encounter with them in real time, so this is speculation to an extent. But in another sense, the space of the exhibition does not create the

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[360] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

conditions for visual and affective encounters in some seemingly neutral or self-evident way, in the way that the 'white cube' requires visitors to draw on prior knowledge and utilise cultural capital to 'appreciate' or 'interpret' works. In this space the works' possibility is set up in relation to a conceptual curatorial framework that is verbal, but that in turn takes its cue from the encounter with artworks. Reflecting on the overall exhibition structure in a seminar in 2010, de Zegher said,

> I didn't really want to make the exhibition into sections, but some of my colleagues said if you don't make sections, nobody will understand this exhibition. It's so esoteric; you have to make these sections.[361]

De Zegher's reluctance was due to her investment in visitors having a chance to think and experience the works themselves, rather than being positioned passively by the didactic, authoritative voice of the curator *auteur*. Clearly, however, by refraining from projecting an authoritative voice in the sections, the exhibition risked suffering from almost total incoherence or opacity, as her colleagues noted. De Zegher explained that ultimately she was convinced by their persuasion:

> I think they trying to protect me in a way, like they were saying, if you want to go into museums with this exhibition, you have to make it very clear. You cannot just think people will see everything you're seeing, or thinking. You have to make categories. They never thought I would come up with these kind of weird categories, but I think they had a point. They actually made me clarify exactly what the work was about. So they had a point.[362]

The sections were implemented out of a sense of twofold responsibility: de Zegher had a responsibility to any visitor who was not familiar with her ideas or previous work, or the feminine as a psycho-symbolic position (most visitors). She also acknowledged her responsibility as a visiting curator to the institutions the exhibition travelled to, because they in turn are answerable for providing accessible exhibitions as part of their programming.[363]

De Zegher acknowledges a problematic of how these ideas become intelligibile in the exhibition space. By admitting her section titles were 'weird,' de Zegher refers to their conceptual complexity and poetry/artistic licence. It is very difficult to say conclusively whether her sections were actually legible for the exhibition's visitors, because of the deep and non-verbal level on which the exhibition hoped to work, and the long temporality of the exhibition's aim to focus on 'that which is not immediately visible'. My concern is not to moralise about the curator; but instead to read her work for responsibilities. My reading is that de Zegher understood she was faced with multiple responsibilities to visitors and her host institutions' own responsibilities to orient visitors. It is not that de Zegher's

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[361] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

[362] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

[363] Recently a debate has been (re)initiated in the public domain by critic Sarah Kent, who was sympathetic to *Inside the Visible*'s aims (further discussion in section on press coverage), see Sarah Kent, 'Are Audiences Killing Art and Culture?', *the Guardian*, 2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/culture-professionals-network/culture-professionals-blog/2013/oct/25/are-arts-audiences-killing-culture> [accessed 23 November 2013]. The topic of audiences and museums is expansive; key texts include Caroline Lang, John Reeve and Vicky Woollard, eds., *The Responsive Museum: Working with Audiences in the Twenty-First Century* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

approach wasn't pedagogical or aimed at visitors, but that she saw the role of curator as 'the source of knowledge' as potentially restrictive. In her catalogue introduction, she explained,

> Through the elliptical exhibition display the beholder can identify other connections and unaccustomed juxtapositions. Released from the demand to "say" things, language can waver into the realm of "nothingness", leaving the reader with fragmentary evocations instead of the overly explicit rhetoric of public speech. (36)

In de Zegher's presentation in 2010, she discussed how institutional over-emphasis on explaining ways to think about art has several problematic effects: it may naturalise the functions of language to simplify and exclude, potentially curtail the creativity and intellectual processes of the curator, and more importantly, underestimate the potentially profound ways visitors encounter works and exhibition spaces. De Zegher hoped to meet visitors from different backgrounds and positions, and 'plant a seed' on some level for/with them, which evidences care for their experience of the space and encounter. At the same time, the artists' work was also spared the reductivist and even destructive effect of being simplified by excessive clarification, especially as the exhibition was especially concerned to counteract the history of women's work being overdetermined or its complexities effaced by ideological systems.

De Zegher's way of negotiating these multiple responsibilities is not the only possible curatorial strategy, and I am not presenting it as the resolution or model by which other feminist interventions should compare. But her solution to these intersecting responsibilities, by devising the exhibition's layout and structure in the way she did, reveals a way of opening and preserving a space for relations within and across time, space, visitors' subjectivities, concepts, languages, artistic practices and their others. I explore further in the next chapter the idea that *Inside the Visible* is one instance of care and ethicality in curatorial practice from which we can work.

Exhibition venues and archival resources

For my research project, I have compiled an archive of *Inside the Visible*'s life as a travelling exhibition from archival material from each host institution. As mentioned, at the time of *Inside the Visible,* de Zegher was visiting curator at the exhibition's first venue of four, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (ICA).[364] Material from this institution has been forwarded by staff for my research project, and includes early documents on the exhibition's conceptual development, press releases and reviews; archival material from the exhibition's other venues also provide material on the ICA installation.

Inside the Visible was exhibited at the ICA from 30 January to 12 May, 1996. It was organised by the ICA Director Milena Kalinovska as one of three exhibitions that would highlight the institution's sixtieth anniversary celebrations. The historical emphasis of *Inside the Visible* made it unique on the ICA's program, whose remit covers only contemporary art.[365] The event included a

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[365] Milena Kalinovska, *Inside the Visible: Project Description* (Boston: Boston ICA, 1996).

film series curated by Catherine David, de Zegher's colleague who would curate 1997's *documenta X*, and a community outreach project, the *Women's Shelter Quilt Project* which worked with young women whose lives were affected by motherhood, poverty, and physical abuse. A reading series, conceived by Cecilia Vicuña and organised by Laura Brown, Gail Burton and Maria Ritz also formed part of the programme.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 3. Poster, *'Poetry in Women's Words'*, *Inside the Visible,* ICA, Boston, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center. Artwork from the *Leben? oder Theater*? series by Charlotte Salomon, 1940-42. Gouache. Copyright Stichting Charlotte Salomon. Collection Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam.

The poster for this series, titled *Poetry in Women's Words* (Figure 3) reveals that the title of the exhibition may have lost the phrase 'an elliptical traverse,' representing the curatorial method slightly differently with 'a view of 20th Century art, in, of, and from, the feminine'. This title implies a simpler approach, one of many, rather than a concrete methodology with its own specificity and theoretical groundedness. This reduces the exhibition's capacity somewhat to instigate the specific effects it was carefully designed to prompt.

The marketing and representation of exhibitions was outside of the role designated for visiting curators, and in each venue the in-house graphic design team took responsibility for designing

commercial material for the exhibition and its affiliated programme. In another case, the curator's ideas for the exhibition's image or representation were adhered to by the ICA. A promotional brochure (Figure 4) used the font *Trixie* which is the same as the catalogue cover (Figure 11).

INSIDE THE VISIBLE
January 31 – May 12, 1996

Figure 4. Promotional brochure (detail), *Inside the Visible*, ICA, Boston, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center.

In an email, graphic designer Luc Derycke who worked on the exhibition catalogue explained that typewriter fonts have variants, 'to imitate an old or worn machine, and hard or light touch.' He wrote that *Trixie*,

Reconstructs what subjectivity could be transpiring from typoscripts.

Link to conceptual art in the 60s.

Places the weight of the book content before let's say the 80s.[366]

The temporal displacement of the possible 'subjectivity transpiring from typoscripts' into the time of the exhibition in 1996 helps to emphasise the exhibition's close attention, sensitivity and receptiveness to work by women in the historical field of the twentieth century, as something re-activated, rather than made passive by the passing of time.

Inside the Visible was next shown at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (NMWA), Washington, D.C. from 15 June to 15 September, 1996. There was doubtlessly a palpable shift at this venue, owing to the scope of the institution, 'the only museum in the world dedicated exclusively to recognizing the contributions of women artists.'[367] The difference of this venue does not come through the archive particularly strongly, but it is likely that the exhibition was not novel for showing only women artists, so perhaps many visitors were already in a receptive mindset. On the other hand, visitors may have expected a particular conception of 'women' or form of feminism, so may have found the exhibition a challenge because of its treatment of the feminine. The extensive archive includes behind-the-scenes preparatory notes by the curator and staff de Zegher worked with, an institutional media plan, wall text and promotional material among other documentation. An application form for a construction permit explains that a sixteen foot banner was to be hung at the front of the building, 'with a teal background with white and gold letters saying: Come Inside the Visible... if you dare!' which shows a more fun and playful side to the exhibition's feminist intervention, which could be read as threatening or not, depending on the reader (Figures 4 and 5).[368]

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[366] Luc Derycke to Sibyl Fisher, 'Re: Inside the Visible Catalogue', 17 June 2013.

[367] See the NMWA website, http://www.nmwa.org/about/

[368] Illegible, 'Application for Construction Permits on Private Property', 1996, NMWA.

801 13th street, NW

banner size 16' (H) 8' (W)
banner colors are ~~Blue~~ background; OPAQUE WHITE LETTERS (inside the visible) and
Yellow ———— for the rest of the letters.
please provide air holes , grommets at the bottom corners, and a sleeve at the top for a 11/2" pipe
with velcro attach to the inside outer edges

Come
INSIDE
THE
VISIBLE...

if you dare!

through
September 15, '96
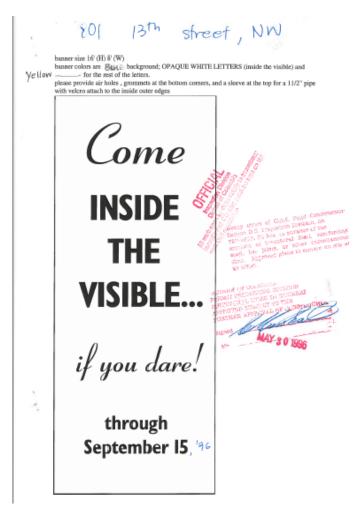
Figure 5. Plan for banner, 'Come *Inside the Visible...* if you dare!', *Inside the Visible*, NMWA, Washington, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center.
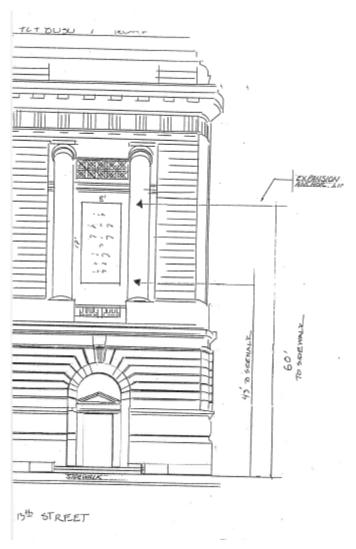
Figure 6. Placement plan for banner for *Inside the Visible*, NMWA, Washington, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center.

The NMWA archive also features an exhibition diagram (Figure 7) which shows the layout of the works, while photographs from the installation offer an impression of the space ready for visitors. The photographs convey a sense of how fragile some works were (Figure 8), and how the curatorial text within the exhibition space itself was visually very subtle, revealing another possibility than the boldness of the authorial curatorial statement (Figure 9). In terms of practical readability, the low contrast of text colour/s against the wall would probably not be permitted today. This shows how institutional and curatorial responsibilities towards different visitor needs have changed over time. In 1996 at this venue, de Zegher's priority was conveying a sense of how some things are not immediately visible or graspable, so the curatorial text performatively enacts and reflects this.
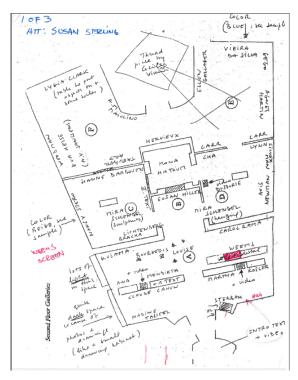
Figure 7. Exhibition diagram for *Inside the Visible*, NMWA, Washington, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 8. Installation shot of *Inside the Visible,* at NMWA, Washington, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center. Artwork *Winay Rutusqua, Weaving in Broken Time (Tejer en Tiempo Quebrado)* by Cecilia Vicuña, 1996. Site specific installation. Courtesy of the artist.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 9. Installation shot of *Inside the Visible,* at NMWA, Washington, 1996. Courtesy of NMWA Library and Research Center. Artworks (far left) *Bronze Coat* by Yayoi Kusama, c.1962. Mixed media. Ikkan Art International Inc., New York, USA; (centre) *Elan* by Susan Hiller, 1982. Thirteen c-type photographs with coloured ink. Courtesy of the artist/ Pat Hearn, NY/ Gimpel Fils, London.

The exhibition showed next at the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London, from 11 October to 8 December, 1996. This venue also houses extensive archival material on the exhibition: six un-catalogued files containing documentation from Boston including press reviews, display panel text from NMWA, marketing material developed by the Whitechapel, funding applications and related budgetary documentation, documentation regarding conservation, travel, loans, display and insurance of artworks, informal correspondence between staff, artists, benefactors and collectors, along with developmental sketches and photographic stills of the exhibition installation. It was the diversity of the Whitechapel archival material that first triggered my thinking about the internal dynamics of a single exhibition, because it was my first encounter with *Inside the Visible* through the archive. It became clear early on in my research that the exhibition was required to shape-shift to a certain extent depending on circumstance. For example, in the unsuccessful application for funding submitted to the Arts Council of England (ACE), Whitechapel curatorial staff wrote that *Inside the Visible* would:

> [O]ffer a kind of antidote to the more conventional treatment of the century in *The Age of Modern Art*. This exhibition, which will originate with Zeitgeist in Berlin and will be shared by the RA [Royal Academy], Hayward and Whitechapel in Autumn 1997, is built around the work of four leading male artists and four formal movements.[369]

There are no records at the RA or Whitechapel of *The Age of Modern Art* ever having taken place under that name, so it is difficult not to speculate, however the representation of *Inside the Visible* as an 'antidote' is interesting because it means contravening and almost healing or compensating for mainstream exhibitions of the twentieth century which had some kind of injuring effect. It offers an insight into the Whitechapel's understanding of the exhibition and its seeming rationale, which would have in turn reshaped the exhibition's self-representation as it encountered

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[369] *Funding Application to ACE* (London: Whitechapel Art Gallery, 1996).

different requirements to 'survive' and respond to localised circumstances. A letter from one Whitechapel curator suggests funding was integral to the exhibition's going ahead: 'due to severe difficulties at the gallery this year, one of the criteria for taking the exhibition has to be the likelihood that we will secure funding for it'.[370] While the ACE did not provide funding, despite encouraging the gallery to apply, other sources were obtained because the exhibition went ahead, although there is no documentation showing a clear breakdown of this.
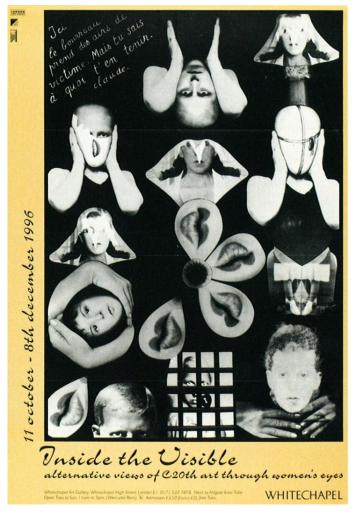
Figure 10. Poster, *Inside the Visible,* designed by Kate Stephens, Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1996. Artwork *Untitled* by Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore, 1929-30 Gelatin silver print. Collection of Helen Kornblum, St. Louis, Missouri. Courtesy of Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive.

The necessity of attracting paying visitors to cover at least a proportion of the net cost to the gallery is one factor that accounts for a detectable shift in the Whitechapel marketing material, where the exhibition was represented in a simpler way, perhaps to circumvent confusion. In the Whitechapel poster designed by Kate Stephens, the exhibition's full title *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of, and from, the feminine* was replaced by *Inside the Visible: alternative views of C20th art through women's eyes* (Figure 10). Even more than the variation at Boston ICA,

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[370] Felicity Lunn, 'Sponsorship for ITV', February 1996, WAG/EXH/2/466/2 Sponsorship, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive.

this title distinctly alters the emphasis of the original title, losing the subtlety of Pollock's phrase 'in, of, and from, the feminine', orienting the exhibition instead towards providing an alternative to the mainstream, which thereby risks negating the intended feminist effect of subverting and undoing the mainstream/alternative, important/unimportant binary. The imagery also conveys a more reactive, radical feminism underpinning the exhibition, rather than a self-reflexive feminist problematic within the very fabric of the exhibition itself.

By comparison the cover of the catalogue features a photograph of the installation *Entrevidas (On the Margins of Life)*, by the participating artist Anna Maria Maiolino in 1981 (Figure 11). While this image portrays a subtle and contemplative poetics, conveying a wide range of meanings from the beauty of a careful negotiating method to the fragility and resilience of the feminine, the Whitechapel Art Gallery poster is austere and didactic. While the main image from 1929-30, *Untitled* by Claude Cahun and Marcel Moore was displayed in this installation of the exhibition (it was not shown at the ICA), its tendency to provoke anxiety about identity is noted within the catalogue by Laurie J Monahan who wrote the entry on Cahun. The Whitechapel archive's collection of press reviews of *Inside the Visible* also index some of the effects of the fluidity of the exhibition's representation and arising meaning, and I explore these in the section on press coverage below.

One interesting and thoughtful image in the Whitechapel archive is a drawing by de Zegher on a fax to exhibition designers (Figure 12). It shows a vision for the exhibition space with less finality than the photographs, and more experimentation in terms of the process of thinking about the exhibition spatially. I would also suggest it indexes the curator's thinking with, and opening herself to, the artworks. We could think about this as an ethical relation where the curator does not dominate the artwork or vice versa, but where they co-exist in a productive space, the curator in an act of care thinking with the works rather than for them, designing the kind of exhibition space that would offer the conditions to prompt transformative encounters with the them and most effectively help generate productive knowledge about them, while the works' own physicality, materiality and 'symbolic worldview' or circumstances of production shape the way the curator understands them and their possibilities in the exhibition space.
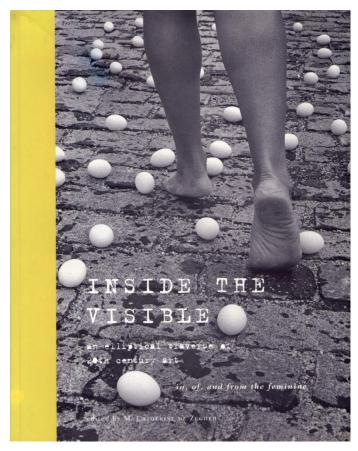
Figure 11. Catalogue cover, *Inside the Visible* catalogue, 1996. Courtesy MIT Press. Artwork *Entrevidas (On the Margin of Life)* by Anna Maria Maiolino, 1981. Installation. Photograph by Hanzy Stahl.
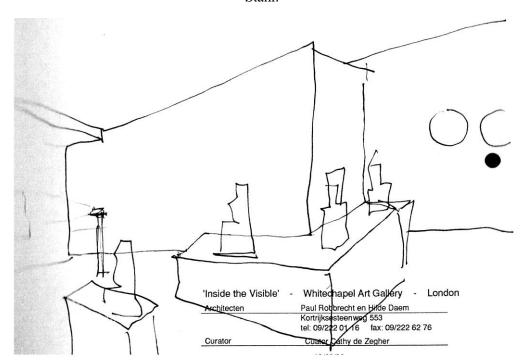
Figure 12. Fax with drawing by Catherine de Zegher for *Inside the Visible,* Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1996. Courtesy of Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive.

Following its London installation, *Inside the Visible* travelled to the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA), Perth, from 13 February to 6 April, 1997. AGWA curator Gary Dufour has explained that he was interested in the exhibition travelling to Perth 'primarily because of [his] awareness of Catherine [de Zegher]'s work as [they had] been friends and colleagues for years,' which highlights the importance of curatorial networks and shared interests and perhaps politics.[371] Furthermore 'the Perth Festival at that time was a time in the city's annual calendar when international projects were scheduled across all the arts.'[372] In 1997, AGWA prepared an extensive website for the exhibition, but according to Dufour this is no longer live on the website or accessible, meaning that the archive currently consists only of photographs.
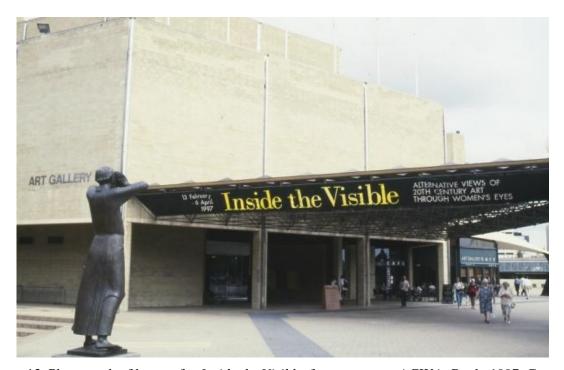
Figure 13. Photograph of banner for *Inside the Visible,* front entrance, AGWA, Perth, 1997. Courtesy of Gary Dufour, AGWA.

These photographs reveal much about the final installation of *Inside the Visible*. The photographs suggest that work by sixteen artists travelled to Australia, but this is not conclusive.[373] Documentation in the Whitechapel archive explains that there were practical reasons for some omissions, for example Charlotte Salomon's work was too delicate to travel beyond London. Nevertheless *Inside the Visible* had high visibility in and outside the Gallery (Figure 13), spanning two floors with extensive signage.

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[371] Gary Dufour to Sibyl Fisher, 'Response to Inside the Visible Questions', 1 August 2011.

[372] Dufour to Fisher.

[373] One photograph shows that the work of only sixteen artists was highlighted on a main wall of the exhibition, although while Vicuna's name is omitted from this list, her work is shown in another photograph in the exhibition space, so it is unclear how many more than sixteen travelled to Australia.

Again the exhibition's 'identity' changed as well. This time, the exhibition was titled *Inside the Visible: Alternative Views of 20th Century Art Through Women's Eyes,* losing both the 'elliptical traverse' methodology and 'in, of, and from, the feminine,' arguably conveying a homogenous notion of 'women' although 'views' is pluralised in contrast to the ICA in Boston. The typographic font was lost as well. Figure 14 shows that works were installed with little curatorial text within the space, pale walls again superficially veering close to the 'white cube' aesthetic. The glass cases around Maiolino's clay forms was new, perhaps preventing a spontaneous encounter, but alternatively perhaps emphasising their preciousness. Paintings and mirrors leant up against walls and suspended from ceilings seem to have created a more dynamic space than the conventional wall hang. The heavy dark concrete interior of the AGWA building would also changed the encounter with the works*,* perhaps dramatising their materiality in a different way to NMWA: some works definitely look more monochrome in AGWA, but again the archive itself dictates what can be understood of the moment.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 14. Installation shot of *Inside the Visible,* AGWA, Perth, 1997. Courtesy of Gary Dufour, AGWA. Artworks (left, centre, hanging) *Untitled. Objetos graficos,* 1968. Installation. Various collections. (centre, plinths) *Equalities/Differences* by Anna Maria Maiolino, 1995. Ceramist clay. Courtesy of the artist.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 15. Banners for exhibitions, AGWA, Perth, 1997. (Left) *Daughters of the Dreaming: Sisters Together Strong*, 1997; (centre) *Modern Masters from the Museum of Modern Art, New York: The William S Paley Collection*, 1997; (right) *'Inside the Visible'*, 1997.

At AGWA, Inside the Visible was shown concurrently with two other exhibitions*: Daughters of the Dreaming: Sisters Together Strong* (1997) and *Modern Masters from the Museum of Modern Art, New York: The William S Paley Collection* (1997). This would have created an interesting dynamic. *Daughters of the Dreaming* featured work by Indigenous women artists from Western Australia. Dufour wrote that 'the exhibition was described as "a powerful exhibition of traditional and contemporary Aboriginal art providing an opportunity to appreciate for the first time the strength, diversity and beauty of the work of Western Australia's Aboriginal women artists."'[374] As the first all-women Western Australian Indigenous exhibition at a major state gallery, *Daughters of the Dreaming* echoes *fluent* in its significance. As an instance of the works of several diverse women artists being gathered together into one space or conversation (and the emphasis on togetherness and strength in the title), *Daughters of the Dreaming* also finds an affinity with *Inside the Visible* as an instance of works by diverse women, many from Europe and South America but none from Australia or Indigenous, being exhibited together in a show that was distinctive from other shows of art made by those traditionally excluded from normative histories of art. Perhaps strength was a shared feature of the two exhibitions, or perhaps it was not. Either way, their concurrence speaks of many potential resonances and inflections.

Modern Masters from the Museum of Modern Art, New York by comparison was clearly represented in a way that emphasised its authority and hegemony as an exhibition, and the authority of the highlighted 'men artists.'[375] Although their masculine gender went unremarked in the branding, it

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[374] Artists represented included Sally Morgan, Julie Dowling, Sue Wyatt, Sandra Hill, Julie Dixon, Alta Winmar, Gladys Milroy, Norma MacDonald, and Gnunga Mia, together with remote indigenous artists from the Balgo community Bia Bia, Tjemma, Susie ootja Bootja, Mati Mudjidell, Dora Mapaljarri and Margaret Anjulu.

[375] I use the somewhat awkward term 'men artists' to underscore how unnatural it seems to designate artists as men, usually because their gender goes without saying, whereas 'women artists' comes more naturally because it is more common to differentiate women artists on the basis of their gender.

was identified implicitly in the same terms that conveyed their 'greatness': this exhibition's banner reads, 'more than seventy works by Picasso, Cezanne, Degas, Gauguin, Matisse, Toulouse-Lautrec and other giants of modern art.' We know from *Inside the Visible* that titles and banners may be altered according to various commercial contexts, so it is not possible to conclusively establish the exhibition's ethos. The collection of William S Paley is revealing however. Paley was a philanthropist who served as MoMA's president from 1968 to 1972, and Chairman from 1972 to 1985. Assistant Curator at MoMA Lilian Tone has explained that Paley's collection includes work by only one woman artist, Agnes Martin, who also featured in *Inside the Visible*.[376]

Inside the Visible would have been able to potentially make a very clear intervention into AGWA's programme in early 1997; although it was arguably somewhat compromised by the branding's implication that it offered 'alternative' and therefore less important 'views' of the twentieth century. Its intelligibility would have perhaps been clarified by the connection with *Daughters of the Dreaming*'s curatorial premise, or alternatively the two exhibitions may have 'paled' in the shadow of *Modern Masters*' self-authorising importance.

To conclude, each of the four venues actively contributed to the changing manifestations of *Inside the Visible*. While the archival material does delineate which moments in the exhibition's 'life' I can investigate in detail, it is clear that the exhibition was not transported unchanged from place to place, and moreover the changes in the distribution of responsibility show the circumstantial and temporal limits and possibilities of ethicality in curatorial practice.

Beginnings. *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine in Flanders*

The large-scale exhibition *Inside the Visible* initially took the form of a series of process-oriented, 'double solo' exhibitions under the name of *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine in Flanders* at the *Béguinage* of Saint-Elizabeth, Kortrijk, in Flanders, Belgium.[377] Curated by de Zegher, the series was organised by the Kanaal Art Foundation from April 16, 1994 to May 28, 1995. De Zegher was compelled to organise an exhibition on contemporary art by women, and decided to 'start very small' in the *Béguinage*.[378]

From the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries in the Low Countries, Germany and France, women called *béguine* gathered together into communities called *béguinages*. Without taking vows or necessarily renouncing their property, they lived independently of mainstream society, engaging in prayer, lace-making, laundering, teaching and welfare work. In her presentation on *Inside the Visible* at Leeds University in 2010, de Zegher discussed how the *béguine* movement 'occurred at a time of a kind of struggle for human rights, when the feudal system started to topple... many women no longer wanted to live under the constraints of the existing social structures, so they chose to live a monastic

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[376] Lilian Tone to Sibyl Fisher, 'Your Message', 28 October 2013.

[377] The phrase 'Begin the Béguine' is taken from a song of the same name, written by Cole Porter. The 'Béguine' of the song's title refers to a type of dance.

[378] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

life in spiritual freedom, exempt from men, from institutions, and possessions.'[379] Other sources attribute the rise of the *béguine* to the crusades, wars and local feuds which left women without men to marry, which positions *béguinages* as a last resort.[380] Another explanation is that *béguinages* allowed women the option of finding work outside of craft guilds, which positions *béguinages* as a strategic choice for women.[381] In her introduction to the catalogue, de Zegher explains the significance of the *béguine:*

> The originality and power of the *béguine* lie in the perfect amalgamation of their doctrine with their spiritual experience. The contrast between the then-current (male) scholastic doctrine and theirs is a contrast between a doctrine that remains fettered to the intellect and one that is applied to life itself. The latter doctrine allows one to ride to a higher kind of knowledge, not merely theoretical but constitutive of being.[382]

De Zegher is interested in how the *béguine* moved beyond the fixed modes of spiritual life, rationalised in Church rule. When she qualifies scholastic doctrine as '(male)', de Zegher clarifies the tendency of scholastic doctrine to fix and limit thinking to its own traditions, established and perpetuated by men certainly, but more to the point, in men's favour. In other words, for de Zegher, scholastic doctrine is an example of a system of knowledge that cannot tolerate internal difference. The only mechanism to deal with difference or dissent is through marginalisation. A historical example substantiates what de Zegher sees. Historian Penelope Galloway provides, in English, an account of the lack of official support for *béguine*: 'in 1273 Bruno, bishop of Olmütz, wrote to the pope demanding "... have them married or thrust into an approved order."'[383] Similarly, she recounts the actions of the General Council of Lyons, who in 1274 'began official repression of fringe communities like the *béguine*, a process which culminated in the decree of the Council of Vienne in 1312. The latter Council stated "... these women promise obedience to nobody and they neither renounce their property nor profess any approved Rule... [their] way of life is to be permanently forbidden and altogether excluded from the Church of God."'[384] These responses show that *béguinages* were a threat to the current order. De Zegher explains that the *béguine* were suspected by the clergy for playing a 'part in the revolution that was to allow the laity to become acquainted with the sacred texts and with theological knowledge, no longer exclusively through sermons and prayer books but, thanks to translations and writings, in the vernacular.'[385] As such, de Zegher considered the *Béguinage* an appropriate site for initiating an exhibition about women's language, translation, subversive practices, difference and resistance, in the twentieth century.

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[379] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

[380] Penelope Galloway, '"Discreet and Devout Maidens": Women's Involvement in Béguine Communities in Northern France, 1200-1500', in *Medieval Women in their Communities* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), pp. 92–115 (p. 95).

[381] Galloway, p. 95.

[382] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 38.

[383] Galloway, p. 96.

[384] Galloway, p. 96.

[385] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 38.

Early on in my own research on the *béguine*, I noted that a few points that de Zegher makes about them are different in the literature. For example, whether *béguinages* were religious or secular, whether their having control of their lives, property and rights was typical or atypical. Also there are more recent indications that *béguine* were diverse groups within themselves, in terms of class and the experience of poverty.[386] I worked out that these discrepancies are telling in themselves. Firstly, *Béguinages* existed across northern Europe, and it has been established that there was no centralised hub of power or command that regulated their practices, as there was with Cistercian communities, for example. In the endnotes to her catalogue essay, de Zegher notes that her description of the *béguine* is based on *Women Mystics in Medieval Europe* (1989) by Emilie Zum Brunn and Georgette Epiney-Burgard, and Paul Vandenbroeck's catalogue *Hooglied. De Beerwereld van Religieuze Vrouwen in de Zuidelijke Nederlanden, vanaf de 13e eeuw* (1994). So de Zegher's localised research was specific to Flemish and Dutch *béguinages*, which may explain discrepancies. More significantly, de Zegher's slightly different view of the *béguine,* based on the above texts, is more akin to her own interest in archaeology, traces and affect than empirical historical research. De Zegher has read across sources to rethink the *béguine* in a way that does not relegate them to the past, but renews attention on their extraordinary lives. Articulating this difference, in her catalogue introduction, Jean Fisher writes of the *béguine*,

> These voices reverberate down the centuries on the wings of mystery and enchantment; poetic and elliptical, oscillating between the excesses of the defiled body and the ecstasies of the erotico-spiritual garden of delights, they speak of an experience largely unknown to us, trapped in the folds of rationalist accounts of history, to be appropriated by those hagiographers of saints that serve the agendas of the Church... Yet something of these voices catches our breath: a recognition of sorts, not of the mystical experience itself but of what may have given rise to it- a need to express an own sense and understanding of the world for which the dominant uses and forms of language remain unbearably inadequate.[387]

Fisher distinguishes between rationalist forms of history that have accounted for the *béguine*, and the unknowable conditions that gave rise to their experiences which exceed hegemonic language and methods of history. More relational ways of thinking about the *béguine* that draw attention to their lived experiences in the physical space of the *béguinage*, rather than their distance and official status in history, can be seen in connection to more contemporary women's work and worldviews of *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine in Flanders.* Mona Hatoum (Britain, Palestine, Lebanon), for example, installed hundreds of small balls of hair in one room of the *Béguinage* of Saint-Elizabeth for her work *Recollection* (1995) (See Figure 16).

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[386] Walter Simons, *Cities of Ladies: Béguine Communities in the Medieval Low Countries, 1200-1565* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), p. 91.

[387] Jean Fisher, 'The Echoes of Enchantment', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 42–53 (p. 44).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 16. *Recollections* by Mona Hatoum, 1995. Installation. *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine in Flanders, Béguinage* of Saint Elisabeth, Kortrijk, Belgium.

De Zegher reflected later,

It was very difficult for an audience in Kortrijk to understand what this work was about. But just having the visceral reactions to this installation: people would come in and feel the hair among their faces, and feel 'What is going on!?' you know, 'you better clean this place!' I was trying to explain the abject, and how people are excluded. Then they really started to take away what it means.[388]

In Hatoum's work, the bodily presence of the *béguine* may have felt very close.

Other archival resources

Additional to the gallery archives, a collection of four short films that were officially made as part of *Inside the Visible*'s programme comprise a research resource. Originally on video cassette, now digitalised, the films were used throughout the duration of the exhibition for education and informational purposes. These are: a film produced by video producer and curator Branka Bogdanov for Boston ICA, featuring an introduction to *Inside the Visible* and the *béguine* by de Zegher, followed by clips of artists and art historians associated with the exhibition providing commentary on both selected artworks and understandings of the exhibition; an uncut and a final version of Prof Griselda Pollock discussing *Inside the Visible* in response to questions posed about the exhibition's concepts, in the exhibition space at the Whitechapel Art Gallery; a short film of Pollock discussing the four sections of *Inside the Visible* with special reference to certain artworks as she moves around the exhibition space in the Whitechapel Art Gallery; and a film showing Pollock addressing Perth visitors to the exhibition, elaborating on her understanding of the exhibition and undertaking an analysis of the catalogue cover, which features an image of Anna Maria Maiolino's artwork *Entrevidas* (Figure

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[388] de Zegher, 'Seminar II: Inside the Visible, 1996: Case Study'.

11). These films provide valuable information on the exhibition, for example footage of the display spaces in the Whitechapel. They also provide insights into the discursive dynamics of the exhibition, as, like the catalogue, the films together feature several voices participating in a dialogue about the meanings of the exhibition, artworks, feminist theory and other issues.

Another resource is a series of video cassettes that have been digitised as a lasting record of the Catherine de Zegher event, organised under the auspices of the Centre for Cultural Analysis, Theory and History (CentreCATH), held at Leeds University on 4-6 March, 2010. De Zegher led several seminars, delivering a presentation on different aspects of her practice in each, one of which focussed on *Inside the Visible* where she offered an overview of the exhibition's process and her ideas, showing slides of her own photographic record as well (which are not digitised). Question time following each presentation allowed informal discussion to arise between de Zegher and participating research students, some excerpts of which I have used in my analysis. Importantly for my research project, at this event I was able to publicly interview the curator in two separate sessions on her career path, together with a colleague. We aimed to encourage the interview to unfold in a part-structured, part-organic way so that the de Zegher could speak freely about her memories of the exhibition and its moment, giving us a critical insight into its formation as a major feminist intervention in the temporary exhibition landscape. Unfortunately, the first interview was lost in the digitisation process, which meant it had to be restaged in the third year of my research project, October 2011. The time lapse actually gave me a productive period in which to investigate the exhibition in more depth, and then update my questions in relation to my more developed conceptual framework, particularly at that point informed by relational models of feminist ethics. I was thus more equipped to discuss the idea of care in curatorial practice which feeds into the career overview at the start of this chapter. De Zegher in late 2011 was immersed in her preparation for the 18th Biennale of Sydney: *all our relations*, so we had more common ground in terms of relationality as a feminist concept, commitment and methodology as well. Her work in Australia and with Gerald McMaster (Plains Cree people) meant de Zegher was also learning about Indigenous concepts of relationality, just as I was beginning my research on Brenda L Croft, which signalled the depth of potential cross-cultural resonances between her own practice and relationality in Indigenous practices.

The catalogue

The single most important resource for studying *Inside the Visible* is the substantial catalogue, edited by de Zegher and published by MIT Press in 1996. Its significance is difficult to overstate, given its length of almost 500 pages, its scope of five separately-authored introductions and thirty seven entries on the participating artists by critics, art historians, artists and teachers, along with detailed biographical material and high-quality colour illustration. It is important as a fundamental historical and theoretical text in the genealogy of feminist analysis of the temporary exhibition, contemporary art and criticism: as the official record of the exhibition, it is the central documented

site for the exhibition's reflexive questioning and analysis, and therefore offers extensive insight into the history and state of the debates leading up to, and including 1996.

While the catalogue is a major resource, however, it requires critical distance because it is not a transparent vehicle through which to access the exhibition. I address the catalogue at this point in the chapter because it requires careful consideration as a text, which is possible only after laying out the complexity of the exhibition's theoretical density, even though I initially came to this complexity through the catalogue. The paradox is that the catalogue forms the official record and elaboration of any exhibition, but de Zegher's approach is to counteract the authority of curatorial statements and instate a more relational ethos. By addressing the catalogue I therefore aim to analyse the exhibition's strategies and effects in relation to the wider discursive formation of the 'curatorial statement', and track the patterns of responsibility in its specific scheme because these are revealing of the way the relational ethos works in practice.

In the article 'Re-viewing Modernist Criticism', first published in *Screen* in 1981, artist Mary Kelly explains that after 1945, the temporary exhibition became the most prominent form of both entertainment and tuition in the visual arts. Biennials, Annuals, theme shows and historical surveys grew to replace a private system of patronage, a change that occurred alongside a consolidation of 'the practice of reviewing and the sanctioning of art criticism as an academic discipline'.[389] The effect was that knowledge about modern art was produced in discourse at the level of the statement, 'by the institutions which disseminate and disperse the formulations as events'.[390] Kelly recognised the statement as occurring in the format of art criticism, and in the format of the temporary exhibition.

Kelly writes that 'verbal language is the only signifying system which has the ability to analyse itself', and as such, the work of art 'does not possess the means of defining itself as art' or of defining any specific readings it might give rise to. [391] As such, the artwork is open to suggestion as to its final meaning, prior to its being fixed in discourse by art criticism or by the thesis of a temporary exhibition. Kelly proposes that while art criticism negotiated the fixing tendencies of language, however, the temporary exhibition embodied an opportunity for visitors to contribute to a polysemy about the art in question. This is not to say that fixing tendencies are the only tendencies of language. Clearly language contains the potential for subversive and radical re-reading, as deconstruction indicates. Kelly's point is that more often than not, knowledge about modern art, produced at the level of the statement, is neither interrogated, nor is any self-aware interrogation folded into the language in which it is produced. Kelly suggests that the exhibition 'displays discernable openness, a radical potential for self-reflexivity'.[392] That is to say that in the temporary exhibition, there is typically scope for a variety of experiences and interpretations. Hypothetically, for instance, a visitor could contravene an exhibition's layout if they preferred.

[389] Mary Kelly, 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism', p. 41.
[390] Mary Kelly, 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism', p. 41.
[391] Mary Kelly, 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism', p. 49.
[392] Mary Kelly, 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism', p. 59.

Of the catalogue, Kelly writes, 'the authors/organisers impose a declarative order on the exhibition's evasive discursivity', adding that 'artists [...] are often the subjects of exhibition statements but rarely the author's [sic] of its formulation'.[393] This is to say that the catalogue in its typical modernist function, according to Kelly, monumentalises the meanings intended by the curator for the temporary exhibition, fixing official curatorial endeavours and becoming the exhibition's primary historical record. The question is then can the catalogue function in a different way, that is, to promote the polysemy of the exhibition, or a diversity of readings of the catalogue? Can a catalogue avoid the fate Kelly identifies for most works of art becoming merely the illustrations to a thesis? De Zegher worked towards this end, developing strategies within the catalogue to support the exhibition's ethos of relationality and multiplicity. She also devised ways for the catalogue to function as an enactment of this ethos in its own right, as a signifying space within which artworks and texts could co-exist and co-affect. I shall read through the major aspects of this double work in this section.

Following the opening pages of the catalogue which indicate the exhibition's key details, De Zegher initiates a series of five introductory articles with her Introduction titled 'Inside the Visible'.[394] De Zegher begins with a rereading of an art historical case study that reveals the systematic absenting from women artists in what have come to be the dominating art historical narratives. De Zegher examines the poet Adon Lacroix's sound poems, one titled *Etymons* (1919). She notes its resemblances in sound and in sign to one of Marcel Duchamp's most famous works, *L.H.O.O.Q*, also dated 1919. Although Lacroix's work with her then-husband Man Ray as a translator between the artist and Duchamp was essential, and her artistic experimentations clearly significant, de Zegher suggests that Lacroix's work was taken as an 'available readymade for Duchamp and the "master's" narrative.' Subsequently following her divorce from Ray, Lacroix was almost entirely written out of the historical record, 'no longer belong[ing] to "the group." De Zegher states her interest in introducing a 'critical reading of a woman a sign or as *objet trouvé*, the coming-into-language and articulation of "beginnings", and the underlying mechanisms of "in/visibility" at issue in the exhibition'. She refers to an art historical reading that pinpoints the constant play of (sexual) difference in Duchamp's moustachioed Mona Lisa, which is exemplified by 'oscillation between male and female parts in the work' in which 'difference is endlessly delayed [and] is in this sense only realisable in a fluid, ongoing engagement'.

This microcosmic case study allows de Zegher to introduce and illustrate the notion that difference does not consist in essential oppositional positions, but in transaction or exchange. Against the tendency revealed by Kelly that the monumental catalogue imposes a declarative order on artists' work in the exhibition, de Zegher enacts a deconstructive gesture. That is, in 'beginning', de Zegher undoes the notion of beginning as a foundational origin from which other work derives or succeeds, or

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[393] Mary Kelly, 'Re-Viewing Modernist Criticism', p. 59.

[394] Prior to the first introduction, there are: a list of the participating artists; Cecilia Vicuña's statement; the epigraphs; a 1932 black and white photograph by Claude Cahun; information about the exhibition and publication; a foreword by The ICA's then director; the list of lenders and the table of contents.

over which it triumphs. In the light of this, de Zegher explains one of the most important concepts of *Inside the Visible*,

> Difference is far more entangled and complex than we like to admit. Taking this into account, I have attempted to develop an exhibition concept that bypasses the artificiality of "oppositional thinking" while acknowledging the work of deconstructionism, feminism and post-structuralism, which has been instrumental in revealing the operations that tend to marginalise certain kinds of artistic production while centralising others.[395]

In this statement, de Zegher moves beyond oppositional and potentially-disfiguring tropes of central/peripheral, superior/inferior, object/subject and ideologically-constructed masculinity/femininity. She explains the structure of the exhibition is 'prompted by an observation of multiple convergences in aesthetic practices both in time (over different periods of the twentieth century) and space (in different parts of the world),' which manifest in the sections organise artwork according to the recurrent moments of repression, the 1930s-40s, 1960s-70s and 1990s.[396] The curatorial procedure of cross-cutting these periods with open-ended themes echoes de Zegher's formative experiences in archaeology, as it 'may be likened to an excavation of material traces and fragmentary histories, which would be recombined into new stratigraphies or configurations to produce new meanings and insights of reality.'[397] Furthermore, de Zegher is aware that the exhibition's view of the historical field is not objective, but will 'find[s] new audiences each with its own symbolic worldview' as the exhibition travels. In this way, for de Zegher, *Inside the Visible* 'addresses the specificity of the encounter between work and viewer and the continual reinvention of the aesthetic experience.'[398]

From here de Zegher expands on her vision for the exhibition. *Inside the Visible* addresses the differences of artistic responses to different circumstances; whether 'state repression, nationalism, [or] xenophobia,... there exist different perceptions of the same reality, or material expressions of coexisting and often conflicting realities.'[399] In this system, de Zegher writes 'that which does not fit has too often been dismissed, delayed, or rendered invisible by the privileged terms of hegemonic elites whose existence is nevertheless predicated on this eclipse of difference.'[400] *Inside the Visible* therefore refocuses on,

> The perturbing, the dissenting, the dangerous, the repressed... without naming "difference" and subsuming it under reductive and totalizing systems of thought.... This shifting experience and thought are embodied in the exhibited works by an absence of fixity that attends to the ambiguous, the permuting, the composite, the flexible, the ephemeral.[401]

One particular area of contemporary art and feminist art theory, for de Zegher, has challenged the 'triumphant gaze' that eclipses that which does not align or has different qualities of

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[395] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 20.
[396] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 20.
[397] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 20.
[398] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 20.
[399] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 21.
[400] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 21.
[401] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 21.

perceptibility.[402] Explorations of the other possibilities than the gaze and phallocentric theories are 'at stake in the legacies of twentieth-century art,' and are therefore not new. What is new however, de Zegher argues, 'is its symbolisation through theorising and naming—as the "Matrixial gaze" by Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger—which makes it legible in the work of art.'[403] De Zegher explains Griselda Pollock's statement in the light of Matrixial theory: 'modalities based on the rejection/assimilation (self/other, love/hate, aggression/identification) paradigm apply to how paintings are viewed as much as to how societies treat immigrants.'[404] Ettinger's poetic exploration in psychoanalytic terms offer for de Zegher 'a model for human situations and processes in which the *non-I* is not an intruder but a partner in difference.' De Zegher quoted Ettinger's explanation of the Matrix:

> An unconscious space of simultaneous emergence and fading of the *I* and the unknown *non-I*; matrix is a shared borderspace in which *differentiation-in-co-emergence* and distance-in-proximity are continuously rehoned and reorganised by metramorphosis created by—and further creating—*relations without relating* on the thresholds of being and absence, memory and oblivion, subject and object, me and the stranger, *I* and *non-I*. The metramorphic consciousness has no center, it constantly slides to the borderline, to the margins. Its gaze escapes the margins and returns to the margins. Through this process the limits, borderlines, and thresholds conceived are continually transgressed or dissolved, thus allowing the creation of new ones.[405]

Ettinger's theorisation and naming, for de Zegher, has potential for shifting deep-seated structures that may have great resonance especially for the cultural field, and in particular the way art made by women are understood and experienced. De Zegher provides an extract from Griselda Pollock's text to describe this significance of this possible shift:

> If we allow ourselves to introduce into culture another symbolic signifier to stand beside the phallus (signifier of difference and division in terms of absence and loss orchestrating these either/or models), could we not be on the way to allowing the invisible feminine bodily specificity to enter and realign aspects of our consciousness and unconsciousness? This will surely extend as do all these metaphors of sexual difference to other Others—issues of race, immigration, diaspora, genocide are tangled at the moment around the lack of means to signify other possible relations between different subjects—*I* and *non-I*. The matrix as symbol is about that encounter in difference which tries neither to master, nor assimilate, nor reject, nor alienate. It is a symbol of the coexistence in one space of two bodies, two subjectivities whose encounter at this moment is not an either/or... This feminist theorisation is not an alternative in opposition to the phallus; rather, the opening up of the symbolic field to extended possibilities which, in a nonphallic logic do not need to displace the other in order to be.[406]

The Matrix is therefore a symbol by which difference can be configured in another way, that does not displace phallocentrism entirely, but as a way of understanding and shifting many of the ways of dealing with difference in culture that are destructive, non-hospitable and so on. De Zegher and Pollock's focus on a shift to the co-existence of two psycho-symbolic signifiers gets to the

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[402] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 21.
[403] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 22.
[404] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 22.
[405] P.22 in de Zegher. I explore the concept of Ettinger's understanding of relationality in the next chapter.
[406] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 22.

deepest possible level on which difference as a fixed division between self/other, rejection/assimilation, and so on, is made possible and inscribed. From the focus on transforming sexual difference can lead other cultural shifts, which may in turn transform relations and categories on the grounds of race, immigration, genocide and so on, as Pollock explains.

De Zegher presents the work of the selected women artists in the exhibition in the light of this transformation that does not reject with finality. The artists 'appear to recognise that working within and not outside patriarchal discourse with what is on hand—a kind of bricolage—erodes established meanings and naturalized differences and destabilizes fixed gender and racial categories.' Because the artists do not overthrow or reject the systems in which they partly locate their subjectivity and intervene, they work less in the mode of rejection and dismissal that characterises linearity and succession, and more in the mode of 'beginning' in Edward Said's sense of 'combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work in language.'[407] This relates to the micro-case study about Adon Lacroix at the start of the Introduction where the poet's work was demoted to primary material which could be elevated to the status of art by Duchamp, effectively writing Lacroix's earlier creativity out of the historical record. *Inside the Visible,* de Zegher writes, 'gradually unfolds in time and space over each of the four sections, [and] deliberately includes a variety of aesthetic strategies that go beyond the dichotomoy of "original" and "readymade".'[408]

Having established the exhibition's conceptual basis, de Zegher next explains the framework of each section or open-ended theme. Because I have already laid these out earlier in the chapter, I shall only briefly recall each of these here, starting with *Parts of/for* which introduces an 'invisible feminine dimension of plurality and difference, on the one hand by recognising the enunciation of our feminist predecessors, and on the other hand by acknowledging the importance of their dissent from the phallic norms of fixed identity and fixed boundaries.'[409] Works in the section *The Blank in the Page* further expand the radical poetics of alterity, risking '"incoherence" through their acceptance that the act of marking the blank surface may constitute a refiguring or coming-into-language from a space of uncertainty.'[410] *The Weaving of Water and Words* further explores language, alterity and space, in practices that negotiate the relationship between nature and space, and the weaving grid with its mastering and also shifting tendencies. The final section *Enjambment:* "La donna e mobile" investigates an idea central to the whole exhibition; that ideas do not 'have material substance but are made material in the work itself,' which are 'a simultaneity of body, eye, hand, thought, and action, and also past, present, future.' This section draw attention to the relationship between 'work, maker and beholder [who] exist potentially in a state of transformation.'[411]

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[407] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 23.
[408] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 24.
[409] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 27.
[410] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 27.
[411] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 32.

De Zegher asserts that these sections 'may be structurally useful, but mainly they constitute a complex whole elucidating crossovers among all of these very different works.' This kind of non-categorised view of artistic practice underpins de Zegher's idea that the exhibition 'should be transitory; it should neither be an answer nor a fixed statement but rather a spectrum of activities that offers different perspectives, a set of relationships, a discussion, a dialogue without canon.' For the curator, the best way to describe the sense of amazement and wonder of such a juxtaposition that can contain both specificities and differences is the *Wunderkammer,* or cabinet of curiosities, although not in its 'authoritarian systems of communication' which are overly reliant on categorisation. De Zegher explains, '*Inside the Visible* is conceived within this space of amazement shared by the artwork, the maker, and the beholder—in what may be called a "participatory relation."'[412] Again the curator frames the exhibition as conceiving of generative ways of thinking about and encountering art as relational.

As de Zegher concludes her catalogue introduction, she turns attention to an affinity between artists in *Inside the Visible* and the *béguine* of twelfth century Flanders, in an act of cyclically revisiting the exhibition's 'beginnings' as a moment of earlier focus and creative acts of looking back, negotiating otherness. The selected artists were 'either marginalized by their societies—including, of course, the art world—or exiled for political reasons,' while the *béguine* 'exemplify this recurring state of exclusion from language and women's rebellion against it.' For this reason *Inside the Visible* began in the *Béguinage* of Saint Elisabeth in the form of *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine:*

> At that moment, the local, Flemish *béguinage* reveals a translational quality, assisting in the "realignment" of memory and the present and in the repetitive field that addresses language. This site seemed to require the reinscription of global relations... Following Homi Bhabha, we can ask if it is possible to be committed to the specificity of event yet linked to a transhistorical memory. As a response, it is important to open up an intervening space, a space of translation.[413]

Furthering this relational ethos of translation and grounded exploratory inquiry into that which is not pre-determined or immediately perceptible, de Zegher in her editorial capacity had four further introductions commissioned for the catalogue. In a sense de Zegher dispersed responsibility to four writers (including herself) with distinct subjective positions and 'symbolic worldviews' in order that the curator does not retain the rights to explain or state the exhibition's remit in perpetuity, although de Zegher did retain editorial responsibility.[414] Art historian Jean Fisher discusses the *béguine* in her text 'The Echoes of Enchantment', whose voices 'reverberate down the centuries [...] they speak of an experience largely unknown to us, trapped in the folds of rationalist accounts of history'.[415] Art historian Paul De Vylder's text 'Allegory as Art of Interfacing (A Failed Fable, an Iconographical

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[412] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 36.

[413] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 38.

[414] I have distorted the destabilising of the 'curatorial statement' format somewhat by focussing on de Zegher's introduction in my chapter, however I hope to have shown its emphasis on transition, shifts and translatory spaces rather than reinforced its authority.

[415] Fisher, 'The Echoes of Enchantment', p. 44.

Incident, and an Anachronistic Symposium)' poetically explores speech and allegory. Griselda Pollock's text 'Inscriptions in the Feminine' develops a specific theorisation of the feminine in relation to psychoanalytical thinking that corresponds with the exhibition's title and historical plotting of 'the feminine,' which I plotted in my descriptive analysis of the exhibition's title and concept earlier in the chapter. Psychoanalyst and artist Bracha L Ettinger, the only featured artist in the exhibition to contribute as a writer, follows with her text 'The With-In-Visible Screen', introduced and interpreted briefly by Pollock, which 'interlaces' the concepts of the Matrixial gaze and screen, developed in her practice.[416] Each of these texts supplement de Zegher's introduction, and further elaborate aspects of the exhibition in distinctive ways while making connections. For example, Fisher's discussion of *béguine* can be thought of as co-emerging partial subjects in Ettinger's sense, not simply unmarried women of the distant past, but women whose subject positions may be reread as subversive, generative of affinities with contemporary aesthetic practices, while Pollock's discussion of feminist art historical interventions tracks the historical and theoretical conditions that helped make *Inside the Visible*'s intervention intelligible in the cultural politics of its own time.

The thirty seven chapters that follow are divided into the four titled sections that loosely structure the exhibition. Firstly for example, 'Parts of/for' is divided into the subheadings 1930-40s, 1960-70s and 1990s, under which each featured artist is discussed in an entry by a contributing writer. Each of these texts were either commissioned or reprinted from other publications, and as constituents of the main body of the catalogue, they offer different readings of relevant artworks and artistic practices. It does not seem possible here to directly address each chapter in the catalogue, but I can position their diversity within de Zegher's curatorial strategy of facilitating a dialogic. The juxtaposition of the chapters' specific readings correspond with the artistic strategies of assemblage and collage, methods that subvert the same/difference paradigm that de Zegher draws our attention to in her Introduction, but whose contrasts give rise to new hybrid meanings.[417] Similarly, the co-existence of different voices within the catalogue invokes a relational ethos, in which several partial subjects co-fade and co-emerge in Ettinger's terms. In the light of this, the catalogue shows itself to be a differentiated aesthetic and curatorial space, integral to the theoretical and affective work of the exhibition in itself, and in relation to its other sites (contemporaneously the installation in each gallery, subsequently the archive). Furthermore, through its dialogical strategies and curatorial distribution of responsibilities, the catalogue inscribes *Inside the Visible* as a key example of the 1990s moment speaking itself as a heightened moment not just of the repression of feminist activity, but also reparative and relational ethicality.

Press coverage, 1996-7

The exhibition received praise and critical attention in the form of a prestigious award (second prize for *Best Show in an Alternative Space* by the AICA for the Boston ICA installation), 'good

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[416] Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, p. 92.
[417] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 36.

attendances' at each venue (around 25 000 visitors at the Whitechapel, for example) and a sell-out catalogue.[418] The press coverage was largely reflective of these successes but there was a range of responses.

Most press coverage portrayed the exhibition as thoughtful and revealing, and engaged seriously the ideas it explored.[419] For instance, Katharine Webster, a journalist for the Lincoln Journal Star in the USA wrote that *Inside the Visible* was a 'subversive show [that] makes visible threads that connect all women'.[420] Toni del Renzio, a writer for Art Monthly, wrote that '[there] might well be a side to the exhibition which rejects all the slogans and the formulaic accusations in a deeply felt... attempt to clarify the objectives which really serve a feminist interest... After this exhibition, neither art nor its history, theory or practice will ever be the same for men no less than for women'.[421] Sarah Kent explained the thinking behind the choice for all the selected artists to be women: 'In this climate, wouldn't an all-women show be a retrogressive step; a reminder of the bad old days of ghetto-isation, just as we thought it safe to throw away our gender-tinted glasses? Let's not forget though that the majority of museum displays are exhibitions of male artists...'[422] These evidence a body of sympathetic journalism.

The archive also evidenced a less-sympathetic reception by the press. Some are uncomprehending, although mild in tone, for instance Rosanna Negrotti, a journalist for *What's on in London* who stated, "… if each section represents a "hidden" [theme], [it] is certainly well-hidden; you wouldn't be able to work it out without the gallery literature as back up. The best thing you can do is accept that the basic structure of the show is 'elliptical' (shaky), and focus on the work itself; connections between artists are tenuous, and moving from one work to another is often quite wrenching".[423] Unless it is a false comment, it is surprising that the catalogue aided Negrotti's initial confusion, given its subversion of the curatorial 'statement' format.

Other reviews are altogether less open-minded, and reveal hostility. William Feaver opens his *Observer* article discussion of *Inside the Visible* by claiming the exhibition 'appears to have mislaid much of its luggage. Focused as it is on differentiating the work of women artists from other artists, the selection excludes everything by most artists who happen to be women because, obviously, they... would have failed to exhibit any such presumed differences on the identity parade'.[424] Internal correspondence from Whitechapel staff to Boston ICA staff gave an overview of these negative responses, suggesting that older generations couldn't get past the idea that the exhibition is a polemic, or a misconception,

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[418] 'Letter to Chris McCarthy, Executive Assistant, Boston ICA'.

[419] 'Letter to Chris McCarthy, Executive Assistant, Boston ICA'.

[420] Katharine Webster, 'Subversive Show Makes Visible Threads That Connect All Women', *Lincoln Journal Star*, 1996.

[421] Toni del Renzio, 'Inside the Visible', *Art Monthly*, 1997, 41–43 (p. 43).

[422] Sarah Kent, 'Change of Art', *Time Out*, 16 October 1996, p. 20 (p. 20).

[423] Rosanna Negrotti, 'Untitled', *What's On In London*, 27 November 1996.

[424] Bill Feaver, 'Women's Work', *The Observer*, 10 November 1996, p. n.pag.

[t]rying to tell them something which they think they already know, and not being able to see past this, they do not bother to look at what the show is really trying to do. Bill Feaver's article seems to be an example of this kind of defensiveness (and laziness).[425]

The invocation of 'laziness' is the key into tracking responsibility in this moment in the exhibition's life: 'laziness' suggests Feaver did not bother to read more closely, pay more attention, or consider more carefully. For the Whitechapel staff, the unimpressed journalists have not *taken on* the responsibility that the exhibition solicits, and therefore they remain unmoved by its political and ethical potential. Similar to Feaver, Rosie Millard, the BBC Arts Correspondent writing for *Art Review*, accused 'women only shows' for being 'packed with outdated and obvious feminist symbolism[, and] these shows [are unnecessary] now that women are treated as equals'.[426] It is difficult to ascribe responsibility to the curator, or the exhibition, for such responses, when the exhibition has subjected itself to a high degree of scrutiny in the catalogue in order to counteract and resolve the arguments the critics employ. There is a line where feminist effects cannot prompt repositioning in the temporary exhibition, or set it up as a productive space for transformative encounters and sensitive and progressive knowledge, if its critics are determined to pre-judge the exhibition as presenting a pre-determined thesis. On the other hand, the critics and perhaps many visitors expect the curator to shoulder a responsibility to not only translate but simplify concepts, debates, and even meanings of works. De Zegher's political and ethical disowning or rather problematising of such a responsibility cannot register for everyone, because it exceeds, displaces and defers the terms in which it is being asked to clarify the exhibition and curatorial concepts.

Review of literature

The wider body of existing feminist-inflected art historical scholarship that addresses *Inside the Visible* is generally sensitive to the exhibition's aims and achievements. Art historian Gill Perry, in her book *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: The Visibility of Women's Practice* (2004) wrote that the exhibition unveiled certain 'hidden' and marginal themes in cultural and intellectual discourse which have since enjoyed greater visibility, however its theoretical trajectories remain urgent. Perry wrote, 'this book has been produced in the belief that some of the concerns and explorations that underpinned [...] *Inside the Visible* are still relevant to a study of contemporary practice by women'.[427] *n.paradoxa*, the journal of feminism and art edited by Katy Deepwell has also featured articles, interviews and questionnaires that address *Inside the Visible'*s internal dynamics and significance for feminist engagements with art history. For example, the twelfth online issue features an article by curator Renée Baert titled 'Historiographies/Feminisms/Strategies', which lists aspects of the exhibition that are of importance and interest to a study of feminist strategies in exhibition practice. These include its engagement with the artwork which gives rise to theoretical considerations,

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[425] 'Overall Impression of Responses to Inside the Visible at WAG' to Chris McCarthy, 1996, WAG/EXH/2/466/4, Whitechapel Art Gallery Archive.

[426] Rosie Millard, 'Hard for Women?', *Art Review*, 1997, 54–55.

[427] Gillian Perry, *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2004), p. 4.

rather than 'as is too often the case, artwork pressed into the service as illustration to a pre-existing theoretical argument', and the retrieval of great works by underrepresented women artists, 'not to accumulate great women [...] but to identify and articulate a body of practice that doesn't "fit" past histories and current debate, which has existed in its by-ways, and whose "non-fit" speaks to aporias with [...] feminist art theory'.[428] Similarly, for art historian Joanne Heath, in her chapter 'Women Artists, Feminism and the Museum: Beyond the Blockbuster Retrospective', *Inside the Visible* represented the exciting potential of explicitly feminist curatorial attention to cultural and sexual difference, which 'enrich[ed] and transform[ed] our understanding of the contribution made by artists who are women to twentieth century art practice'.[429]

Similar attention is given to *Inside the Visible* in the thirteenth online issue of *n.paradoxa,* which brings together a range of responses to the question 'What is your most memorable experience of a feminist / women's art exhibition in the past 10 years and why? Did it challenge or change your understanding of feminism?' The critic and academic Susan Platt raised *Inside the Visible* in response, citing its visually and intellectually provocative agenda and unpredictable, international mix of artists.[430] Art historian Hilary Robinson also appreciated the attention to lesser-known artists and generally the 'feminist aspects of [its] curating'.[431]

In the same issue, there was one dissenting voice. The art historian Amelia Jones discussed the exhibition in a less applauding tone, raising what she termed its 'intellectual coyness' and its 'failing to take a firm stand on feminism'.[432] While her comments can be understood with regards to the 1996 exhibition *Sexual Politics: Judy Chicago's Dinner Party in Feminist Art History,* curated by Jones, with which *Inside the Visible* was 'unfavourably compared', she conversely suggests that these factors contributed towards the popularity and successes of *Inside the Visible* in feminist and art historical scholarship and criticism.[433]

This shows the measure of difference between curatorial approaches, or the difference between a feminist statement and the notion of feminist strategies and effects. It would appear that according to Jones, the demand for a 'firm stand on feminism' is realisable in an exhibition. De Zegher approached feminism as a theoretical resource to performatively develop complex strategies, with a view to instigating feminist effects which aim to transform consciousness and prompt repositionings. That is, while they ideally aim for a radical overhaul of repressive systems and structures, they also transmit responsibility 'for feminism', to invoke Spivak; a thoroughly intangible process that could result in the awakening of a feminist consciousness, or the deepening of a feminist understanding.[434] Recalling

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[428] Renee Baert, 'Historiographies/Feminisms/Strategies', *n.paradoxa*, 6–9 (p. 8).

[429] Heath, p. 36.

[430] Katy Deepwell, ed., 'Defining Experiences: Feminist Exhibitions in the 1990s', *n.paradoxa*, 2000, 4–21 (p. 8).

[431] Deepwell, 'Defining Experiences: Feminist Exhibitions in the 1990s', p. 16.

[432] Deepwell, 'Defining Experiences: Feminist Exhibitions in the 1990s', p. 13.

[433] Jones wrote *Sexual Politics* was 'unfavourably compared'.

[434] Gayatri Spivak, 'Imperialism and Sexual Difference,' *Oxford Literary Review* no 8 (1986) 225

the press coverage of *Inside the Visible*, not all responses to complex exhibitions mirror the effectiveness of strategies, or show evidence of feminist effects.

Much more recently, in July 2013, art historian Sue Malvern published a critique of the continued feminist theoretical embrace of Julia Kristeva's notion of women's time, with a specific focus on *Inside the Visible*; I explore this in the next chapter because as a very recent argument it relates more to the next chapter's focus on my argument and contribution to the contemporary field.

Overall the feminist and art historical commentary registers the ways *Inside the Visible* is understood to have contributed historically to feminist strategies for change in the representation of art by women. The exhibition's strategies can be tracked across all aspects of de Zegher's curatorial practice, from her research and conceptualisation, which informed the ways she produced and edited the catalogue, to her installation of the exhibition in different geographical and institutional contexts.

Chapter Four. *Inside the Visible*: An instance of *curare*

This chapter has two main trajectories. First, I consider to what extent *Inside the Visible* is an instance of *curare,* a relational ethic of care. Building on the picture of intersecting curatorial responsibilities within the exhibition as an ethical field, explored in Chapter Three, I establish the theoretical conditions required to conceive the exhibition's curator, Catherine de Zegher, as a relational curatorial subject. How can we think about relational theorisations of subjectivity in the space of the exhibition and its catalogue? The second trajectory of this chapter investigates whether *Inside the Visible* has purchase as an instance of *curare* from which to read and work. What is the significance of its feminist interventions registering in discourse? Where the exhibition's efficacy is subject to contemporary repression, I investigate the ways attention to relational ethicality renews it, so the curatorial impulse to avoid marginalisation and repression, facilitate a productive space in the exhibition, generate progressive knowledge about art and set up transformative encounters can (continue to) be accessed as an effective historical instance of a feminist intervention and as a resource for curatorial practice.

Theoretical conditions

In the second part of the Introduction, I suggested, like curator Miguel Á. Hernández-Navarro, that in order for the ethicality of curatorial practice to come to light, the curator needs to be reconceived as an ethical or moral subject, and the field in which they work (the art world, the institution, the exhibition) needs to be reconceived as an ethical field. In this sense the curator is always already embedded in a network of ethical relations, rather than a distinct subject who is periodically confronted with discrete ethical issues or moral dilemmas that they must resolve. As Margaret Urban Walker has argued in the field of feminist ethics, morality consists in practices of responsibility: 'One of the most effective ways to find out what is valued and who is who in social orders is to follow the trail of responsibilities,' which I propose leads to an insight into curatorial care as arising from practice.[435] Throughout Chapter Three, as I presented a historical account of *Inside the Visible,* I also traced the lines and patterns of responsibility in the signifying space of the temporary exhibition, its archive and catalogue. Here I would like to consider in more depth the notion of the curator as a relational ethical subject in order to build up the picture of de Zegher as enacting an ethic of care.

To expand on the career overview in Chapter Three, de Zegher has said that her early experiences working at the Kanaal Art Foundation consisted of taking on responsibilities that may now be collectively recognised as being a part of the curator's work, and therefore perhaps 'curatorial.' These responsibilities included looking after artists: '... I took care of the others. I fed

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[435] Walker, pp. 16–17.

them; I put them up in my house. I had them stay for months in the house.' [436] In this reflection, a long view emerges of caring as labour, which in all likelihood encompassed a range of domestic responsibilities (for example, washing, shopping, cooking), responsibilities as a host both at home and at Kanaal (making sure artists have access to facilities to meet their own needs for their health and wellbeing, as well as helping them source material for their own art-making), as well as emotional care or labour (for example kindness or conversations, to help artists settle into a strange place, and/or find the peace of mind necessary to work).[437] These many responsibilities can also be recognised as gendered work, which de Zegher highlighted with good humour when she said, 'because I was the only woman [at Kanaal], all the tasks came to me!' Also, when she reflected on *Inside the Visible: Begin the Béguine,* de Zegher explained how she was 'working very much alone. I had one assistant who came once in a while, and together with the artists who were themselves very hands on, all women, not demanding at all, very helpful,' which meant the exhibition came to fruition and helped to secure the grant from the Flemish government to develop *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of twentieth century art, in, of, and from, the feminine.* For de Zegher this kind of work is akin to other forms of caring work: 'Maybe it's because I come from a family of doctors and nurses, I like to take care of people. And curators, that's what curators should be doing.'[438] All the caring responsibilities that are taken on by the curator produce her as an ethical subject, insofar as she assumes responsibilities to care for the other: to recognise them as subjects, to help meet their needs, and so on.

While curatorial care emerges in practice as labour, it is also necessary to consider how this precedes, interweaves and/or enables another level, or mode, of curatorial care that also shows the curator to be an ethical subject. In the 2011 interview with de Zegher, she followed on from the above comments with a reflection about her wider motivations for caring for artists:

> I really love what they're doing, and I feel compelled to take care of them and their work. And I do it because I think if more people could see it, they may come to the same awareness that I come to and that would actually affect the world. Because sometimes we feel so powerless with everything that's going on, but I want to convince people that with small acts, they can actually change the world. Small interventions help, and then in the end, you know you affect the world, you affect society. And for me a lot of that comes out of art: new possibilities, and yeah. In a more imaginative way, and in a way of care. [439]

There are ideas in de Zegher's comment that go beyond the concept of curatorial care solely as a form of labour, which help to bring the curator into view as an ethical subject, or a curatorial subject

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[436] de Zegher and Fisher.

[437] Arlie Hochschild first provided an analysis of 'emotional labour' in 1983. In Hochschild, emotional labour is required by some service industries, for example the flight attendant profession, with implications for estrangement from the self. My usage here operates on the understanding that de Zegher's work was not entirely characterised by 'emotional labour' in Hochschild's sense; I aim to highlight the emotional and non-physical component of caring labour which can otherwise be reductively simplified to physical tasks Simultaneously, my usage here perhaps underplays the deeper affects of 'care' but I move onto this next. Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

[438] de Zegher and Fisher.

[439] de Zegher and Fisher.

with ethical capacities. Firstly there is caring out of love for some instances of art practice, which compels de Zegher to take care of the work and the artists. This is almost captured in the phrase 'a labour of love,' but surpasses its inference of self-sacrifice, and instead suggests a very strong feeling and regard for the other: the work and its maker. In the 'feminism and curating' and also contemporary art discourse, there is a focus on immaterial labour and the production of affect as a process of capitalism.[440] For example, Helena Reckitt has raised the implications for the field of curatorial practice, which produces a pressurised situation in which curators' leisure time, social life and so on must be reconceived as a resource to enrich their professional practice for their very survival as curators. She has written, 'As friendships become instrumentalised and colleagues are treated as friends, the distinction between private and professional relationships erodes,' even citing an instance where extensive networks were a requirement for employment in a curatorial role; we recognise their significance in Gary Dufour's friendship with de Zegher preceding *Inside the Visible*'s installation at AGWA.[441] While these precarious conditions may produce deep friendships and even sometimes love between curators and their colleagues, in de Zegher's practice there is a different impulse, even if (cynically) it does serve her career well. De Zegher specifically says that her love is for what artists 'are doing.' From this, there is care in order to sustain the production of artwork, and to increase people's exposure to artwork, in order to make opportunities available that are transformative, namely bringing people around to the understanding that they can affect the world and change it. These are the repositionings and realisations that de Zegher herself experienced in the first place, from which her love for the other grew/grows. We might understand therefore that de Zegher's love and regard for artists and their work is produced from the experience of being 'ethicised' in encounters with work, and this transformed understanding compels her to 'ethicise' others. Becoming an ethical subject, or learning that one as a curator may have ethical capacities, therefore takes place in a process of ethicising.

To reiterate, for de Zegher, it is clearly not by some transference, or by being told directly in language, that one may first glimpse their capacity for change, but in encounters with artworks that are set up in a certain way and that may not be immediately apparent. I would like to map out in more depth some of the relational processes of *Inside the Visible* and its catalogue as an active, performative and signifying space. These produce the curator as an ethical subject which in turn has ethicising effects.

In terms of the ways de Zegher was already developing her practice as a curator, the selection of works for *Inside the Visible* followed on from earlier experiences at the Kanaal and the *Béguinage*. De Zegher explained in 1996,

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[440] See for example the exhibition *Economy* (2013), curated by Kirsten Lloyd and Angela Dimitrakaki. See also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. ; London: Harvard University Press, 2000); Michael Hardt, 'Affective Labor', *boundary 2*, 26 (1999), 89–100.

[441] Reckitt, p. 143.

As with *America: Bride of the Sun* (1992), I think it is important that one is aware of your own European position. There were times when I was selecting [for] the exhibition, when I would necessarily have selected an artist for my own aesthetic reasons but because there were curators from the same country as the artists who could tell me that this artist is really important for us nationally, even when she would have initially fallen outside my own criteria. In these cases, I felt it would be important to include such artists and it turned out to be good to do just that. What I mean by this is that the exhibition is more than a single perspective and that, as a curator, one shouldn't put your gaze alone on a work.[442] .

Accordingly, de Zegher explains in the *Inside the Visible* catalogue that 'basic to the selection of work' together with Derrida's concept of the trace, is Ettinger's concept of co-emergence as a non-hierachical metaphor that is not predicated on exclusion or rejection, but emergent in relationality.

The archive shows a range of understandings about the status of Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrixial in *Inside the Visible,* which mostly revolve around concerns that one practice may be privileged over others in an otherwise relational space, for example during de Zegher's editing of the catalogue, and also the organisation of the College Art Association (CAA) annual conference panel (1996) on *Inside the Visible* that coincided with the exhibition. Pollock explained in an interview for my research into the historical moment of *Inside the Visible* how a few other artists could understand why Ettinger was asked to write an introductory text in the catalogue, as well as having a chapter written on her artistic practice, given she also featured as an artist in the exhibition.[443] Similarly, speakers on the CAA panel questioned why Ettinger had a 40 minute slot to speak when the rest were each allocated only 20 minutes.[444] De Zegher has clarified the fact that Matrixial theory was one practice of several that she came into contact with in the lead up to *Inside the Visible.* She has said, 'when you open yourself to ideas, things come to you':

> It's like tuning in, and suddenly you meet all the kindred spirits. And that's also how I came to meet Bracha. And we tried to formulate what could be used as a different wording to speak of the feminine. She said, well, I'm working on this whole Matrixial notion, [and I responded,] Wow, this sounds like what I'm trying to say, or what many artists are trying to say.[445]

There was never intended to be a conflation of practices in *Inside the Visible*, but a multi-faceted rethinking and reimagining of the feminine in the late twentieth century. These practices were drawn together in *Inside the Visible* in the idea that they could collectively imbue the cultural field with a larger shift in terms. De Zegher has said:

> I'm really working very closely with artists, and trying to bring their thinking together, to make it strong in a way, to make it readable. Because if you group them at some point, there is... I think there's a real force in it. So that something becomes more explicit. One mark means something, but if you have many marks, it becomes a figure, or it becomes an image that can stay in the mind. That's a bit how I see exhibition building. I never start from [theoretical] material, but I compile, I make a collage, it's much more collage, I love collage. And I love

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[442] Deepwell and de Zegher.
[443] Griselda Pollock, Interview about Inside the Visible, 2010.
[444] Griselda Pollock, 'Interview about *Inside the Visible*', 2010.
[445] de Zegher and Fisher.

patchwork. That's the way I work. Maybe it's also a very feminine way of working, I don't know.[446]

While holding onto this as a necessary view of de Zegher's mode of practice as attentive to irreducible specificity and localised practices while seeing a bigger picture, I would suggest it is possible to emphasise the significance of the Matrixial without privileging it over other concepts in the sense of overshadowing them or reducing them to derivatives. In the way that the Matrixial has been developed poetically in the analytical terms of psychoanalysis and in specific relation to major psychoanalytic theories, as a psycho-symbolic signifier it has a further significance for the exhibition than an artistic and theoretical exploration. Because the intervention/contribution of the Matrixial takes place at the psycho-symbolic level, it works where difference and relation are produced, at a level that is fundamental to, and in-formative of, the manifestation of difference and relationality in language, culture and so on. In 2006, Ettinger explained that in Matrixial trans-subjectivity, in distinction from Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalytic theory which relies on the castration complex, from and contemporary psychoanalytic theories of intersubjectivity and object relations which focus on 'the relations between caring adult (mother) and the baby and revealed between analysist and analysand,'

> A different affective economy... emerges by which one is able to think of an-other kind of loss or separation, which is not attributed to rejection, 'castration' or abjection. This perspective opens up a non-psychotic connection between the feminine and creation, and thus points to an artistic practice that reconnects with an enlarged symbolic in which the feminine (neither male nor female) is fully active and informing knowledge and the ethical realm.[447]

Pollock explains in her introductory text to Ettinger's introduction 'The With-In-Visible Screen' in the *Inside the Visible* catalogue that 'Matrix, as a symbol, is a means in symbolic language to allow into signification, into the realm of discursive meaning, a stratum from human subjectivisation framed by the invisible specificity of the feminine body.'[448] Further on, Pollock explains in more detail that the Ettinger,

> Names the symbol by means of which such sensations and affects, "memories" and phantasies, might be altered to filter through to our Symbolic level of understanding—and social change— the matrix. The artist-psychoanalyst situates her interests not in the pre-Oedipal as presymbolic domain, but in what she calls the subsymbolic—a stratum of subjectivity not at all orchestrated in relation to the phallus, though it exists side by side with the phallic stratum... This theory thus proposes to give symbolic form to the contribution to human subjectivity and to processes of subjectivization produced in relation or made by the invisible specificity of the feminine body as it enters into archaic sensations, phantasies, and finally culture through aesthetic affects and effects.[449]

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[446] de Zegher, Fisher and Theobald.

[447] Bracha L. Ettinger, 'Matrixial Trans-Subjectivity', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23 (2006), 218–22 (p. 218) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026327640602300247>.

[448] Griselda Pollock, 'Introduction to The With-In-Visible Screen', in *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of and from the feminine* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1996), pp. 89–92 (p. 89).

[449] Pollock, 'Introduction to The With-In-Visible Screen', p. 91.

This explains the precise 'location' where the Matrix works as a symbol, and the ways it operates or effects shifts at the Symbolic and cultural levels. The Matrix does not find its elaboration at these levels, but filters to them. In the light of this, Pollock stated,

> But if we allow ourselves to introduce into culture another symbolic signifier to stand beside the phallus (a supplementary signifier to that of difference as absence and loss that orchestrates the either/or modes), could we not be on the way to allowing the invisible feminine bodily specificity that has been an element of the most archaic experience of us all – men and women—to enter and realign aspects of our consciousness and unconsciousness?[450]

De Zegher often quotes this statement when she explains the significance of the Matrix, being very clear about the possibilities that come from allowing another signifier into culture alongside the phallus.[451]

The tensions in the archive which reveal the real concerns of artists about their place in the exhibition and catalogue, and whether there is more weight or air-time given to some theorisations and articulations over others, do show a certain unevenness in the distribution of responsibilities at times. This may indicate that care is not a fixed practice but can be viewed and evaluated in multiple ways and from different positions. But at the same time, it is possible to think about the Matrix working in the 'subsymbolic' or 'stratum of subjectivity' in the space of the exhibition and catalogue. In fact, I would argue this is crucial to acknowledge its efficacy, or to allow it the capacity to produce effects. Allowing this capacity to occur is perhaps a major act of care or *curare*. The place of the Matrix in the epigraphs registers it as a transformed theorisation of the feminine in the contemporary moment which does have transformative capacities, and on these grounds it relates to several relational aspects of the exhibition and catalogue.

De Zegher's way of working out the title *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art, in, of, and from, the feminine* may show Matrixial transsubjectivity taking place in the encounter between the subjects who contributed to its formation. When de Zegher recalled the meeting of her own thinking about the phrase 'inside the visible' and Cecilia Vicuña's poetry, she reflected that she,

> [S]poke about it with Cecilia, who liked it a lot and said she had worked on a poem "impulse of the possible" and how she saw the two as connected, and this is how the poetic lines came about: half mine, half hers...[452]

Similarly, de Zegher liked the phrase 'in, of, and from, the feminine' in Pollock's introduction to the catalogue, so approached her about including it in the title. The exhibition title is not necessarily an affective space in its own right, but it has great significance for the way the exhibition, including the catalogue, is set up as affective and signifying space. In other ways, the art historians, critics and

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[450] Pollock, 'Introduction to The With-In-Visible Screen', p. 91.

[451] In the catalogue introduction, for example, and more recently in 2007, see 'Catherine de Zegher' (presented at the The Feminist Future: Theory and Practice in the Visual Arts, New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2007).

[452] de Zegher, 'Re: A Few Questions'.

writers in the catalogue who contributed texts saw their work juxtaposed in relation to other texts and images in ways that allowed the exhibition's meanings to unfold and inflect, even contradict, one another.

It may be the case that on a deep trans-subjective level the contributors to *Inside the Visible* are produced as relational 'subjects' with the capability to co-affect and make connections in an aesthetic sense. The Matrixial may be a way of naming the subsymbolic of the exhibition space, if it can be said to have such a capacity, resulting from the collective practices and works it gathers together into multi-faceted yet coherent instances of activity. Crucially this must not be seen as standing in for other activity, but it may occur in parallel to connections made on the 'phallic stratum', whether in an intersubjective sense or in the Symbolic and so on. But by recognising the possibility of Matrixial relationality in encounters between the exhibition's subjects, at the level of cultural production, discourse and sociality in the exhibition's spaces, we can begin to glimpse the ethical capacity of the curatorial as a space of generativeness and responsiveness.

Recognising an instance of *curare*

In Chapter Three I aimed to show the extent to which *Inside the Visible* was commended in terms of a curatorial prize, affiliated gallery staff members' reflection on visitor responses, the immediate press response, as well as the subsequent literature on feminism and curating both before and after the catalytic moment of 2007, as an exhibition that transformed ways of thinking about art made by women, and more broadly the twentieth century. This would largely signify that the exhibition's interventions were understood by many visitors, critics, art historians and art writers, not in the didactic sense that they grasped the curatorial transmission of objective facts, but that the multi-layered levels at which the curator organised knowledge and set up encounters with the selected works was intelligible, and corresponded more or less to a legible if very complex and theoretically-dense catalogue, for those who consulted it. Furthermore, the positive response from feminist discussions signified that the exhibition did indeed produce the feminist effects that its curatorial strategies were designed to bring about.

So what is the significance of *Inside the Visible*'s feminist interventions registering in discourse? In one sense, there is the concrete and trackable discursive development that in 1996 and subsequently, the exhibition at the theoretical and conceptual level did actually make contributions, challenge people and prompt shifts in thinking, however reflexively, poetically and dynamically these anticipated effects were articulated by the curator and other contributors to the catalogue. We have evidence that the exhibition *did* bring about those active and positive aims of *curare* that I outlined in the opening lines of my Introduction, that is, the exhibition did produce a productive space in the exhibition, where curatorial practice both generates sensitive and progressive knowledge about work made by artists who are traditionally marginalised, and set up transformative encounters with their work.

In another sense, at a more meta-historical level, the discursive evidence shows that curatorial practice after 1996 has the capacity to bring about complex and specific feminist effects. Of course feminist practitioners were devising sophisticated strategies, producing tangible effects and making hugely valuable feminist interventions long before *Inside the Visible*. For example, Parker and Pollock conveyed this in 1987 in *Framing Feminism* when they gathered together an extensive archive of material that directly recorded the diversity and depth of predominantly British feminist practices in the 1970s and 80s, which led Pollock in that publication to theorise the terms 'feminist interventions,' 'strategic practices' and 'feminist effects.'[453] But with a new clarity, the discourse on *Inside the Visible* following 1996 shows the curatorial capacity to make successfully effective feminist interventions that resolve many of the problems highlighted and debated in feminist critical spaces. These span the non-strategic essentialising tendencies of identity politics (the all-women show), to the problems of commoditising and exoticising artwork of women from or based in countries in Latin America by having them represent an entire continent, for example (tokenism).

These resolutions are not the only ones, and I am not putting forward *Inside the Visible* as *the* curatorial model with which others should compare themselves or from which they should derive. Instead I want to posit the exhibition as one occasion of *curare* because, by using certain qualitative tests derived from the archival analysis, it can be 'proven' to have worked in practice. *Inside the Visible* as an instance of *curare* may complement or even stand in conflict with other exhibitions, such as *Sexual Politics* (1996) curated by Amelia Jones for example in the same year. The point of a politicised concept of care, however, is to disallow the polarisation of ethical and political, and instead to encompass or allow for antagonism and dissent, but also at a more fundamental level, severality and possibility. *Inside the Visible*'s deep-seated ethic of displacing the authority of a hierarchical and hegemonic order of difference (masculine/feminine, centre/periphery, mainstream/margin) as a fundamental organizing category of knowledge on the one hand, while attending to difference having very real effects and importance on the other, offers a concrete historical instance of effective feminist curatorial thinking and practice.

To be clear, de Zegher's practice in *Inside the Visible* is not an instantiation in the philosophical sense that can be abstracted into a set of culturally-mobile procedures or formulas. To recall feminist moral philosopher Margaret Urban Walker's critique of the abstraction of moral practices into 'moral theories': 'In the case of ethics, systematic and very general thinking about morality is often presented as if it were the discovery or uncovering of what morality itself actually is,' whereas 'a conception of morality as itself theory-like or apt for compact propositional codification is installed by excluding most of what morality might consist in as a socially and psychologically real dimension of human life.'[454] In light of Walker's critique that aims to enable reflective thinking on moral practices that do not transcend culture, history and material conditions, suggesting that de Zegher's practice is a model

[453] Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, *Framing Feminism: Art and the Women's Movement 1970-1985* (London: Pandora Press, 1987).

[454] Walker, p. 15.

for feminism or for curatorial strategising risks giving it precedence and making it more fixed. If an openness to the ethical is not predictable or generalisable by a set of codes or a theory, but as attuned to practices of responsibility and 'ethicising' in localised and historical situations, attention to *Inside the Visible* and the practice of de Zegher offer one instance of curatorial practice as ethical, and ethics as curatorial practice, creating a situation from which we can read and then work.

A curatorial ethic of care cannot be reduced or abstracted to the level of an ethical principle. Located in practice, *curare* is consistently shaped and checked by reality. It is illogical to claim that a curatorial ethic of care does not or should never repress or marginalise, because inevitably curatorial practice is selective. De Zegher did not select certain artists for *Inside the Visible*, although their practices may have resonated.[455] Art historian Sue Malvern notes that the exhibition missed out artists from whole areas of the world, including Africa and Eastern Europe beyond Katarzyna Kobro, although the exhibition 'made no claims to be encyclopaedic.'[456] It is not clear whether Malvern advocates a more 'representative' exhibition which would raise problematic questions about mastery and tokenism, but in the sense that she recognises that the curator was interested in highlighting the operations of difference in geographically specific contexts, Malvern draws attention to curatorial selectivity.

In another general way, the language of exhibition texts and catalogues, the textual interfaces of the temporary exhibition, are necessarily selective and *may* alienate on the basis of cultural capital[457] or reading level.[458] For *Inside the Visible,* the Whitechapel addressed this risk by commissioning materials to enable local people to access the exhibition, specifically in the form of films in which de Griselda Pollock spoke about the works from within the exhibition space, offering responses to questions like 'what links all the artworks in the exhibition?' and 'why is the exhibition called *Inside the Visible*?' This could be seen as part of the curatorial enactment of care, by enabling understanding through translation and exploration that acknowledges the incoming viewer's existing knowledge and position/s. But even so, language itself is a technology of othering, a theme the exhibition section 'The Blank in the Page' explored. De Zegher wrote in the catalogue, language 'deidentifies the self since strangeness/otherness of the self occurs as soon as it is constructed, outside the self, as soon as it is symbolised'.[459] Even as the exhibition questioned fixity and prompted relationality, it may be the case that it also 'deidentified selves' and produced 'others' through curatorial language. This is not necessarily destructive in itself. Feminist ethicist Jean Keller argued in 1997 that a productive

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[455] For example, Mary Kelly was not included. In anecdotal evidence, it seems that as a result of feminist writing on her work by Pollock and others, Kelly appeared to de Zegher as already too visible even while her position in the larger art world remains fragile.

[456] Malvern, p. 108.

[457] Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984).

[458] David Dean suggests that reading level for exhibition text should be assumed as 13-14 years old, see David Dean, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice* (Psychology Press, 2002), p. 116.

[459] de Zegher, 'Inside the Visible', p. 27.

conception of relationality has to engage with autonomy.[460] In a related context, Ettinger does not suggest that the Matrix replace the Phallus as a psycho-symbolic symbol, but that it might already be supplementing it.[461]

There are also practical constraints on exhibitions from an institutional angle. A major limitation on curatorial practice is the commercial pressure on curators to produce exhibition concepts that are easy to package to produce maximum cashflow. Art historian Joanne Heath, writing about the critical potential of *Inside the Visible* compared to 'feminist blockbuster' exhibitions, stated in 2008,

> ... Many commentators have noted [that] museum professionals, forced to operate under increasingly commercial constraints, have come to adopt an overtly populist approach to exhibition-making and have by and large proved hesitant to embrace the critical questions posed by the revisionist art history that has so transformed the discipline within its university setting.[462]

Institutions are politically conservative at least in part because this approach to programming makes commercial sense. There may be many points at which an institution might decide against an exhibition with a very explicit ethic of care, and all these reasons for exclusion may individually be valid and rationalised, but collectively may have a destructive effect. At some point, *curare* needs to be recognised and systematically allowed into the cultural imaginary and therefore, by extension, curatorial studies, museum ethics, museum policy and protocol. Ultimately it is completely realistic that *curare* cannot persistently fulfil its own aims, but if it is thought or made to be consistently impossible, then the situation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy and it is not permitted into intelligibility.

There is one line of thought within critical feminism and curating discourse that proposes *Inside the Visible* is an outdated feminist curatorial project. In 2013, Sue Malvern wrote in her chapter 'Rethinking *Inside the Visible*' in *Politics in a Glass Case: Feminism, exhibition cultures and curatorial transgressions* that with a certain shift in thinking, '*Inside the Visible, Sexual Politics, WACK!* and *Global Feminisms* would have had their moment and future feminist curating, if it is to have a new future, would need to have unshackled itself from the past.'[463] Her logic rests on a specific critique of Julia Kristeva's text 'Women's Time', so first I shall revisit the key texts to arrive at her position.

In 1981, Kristeva in 'Women's Time' proposed two ways of thinking about temporality. Linear time, the time of project and history, is the temporality into which the women's movement aspired/aspires to find a place for women through socio-political struggles such as the vote or equal pay for equal work. These struggles 'are all part of the *logic of identification* with certain ... logical

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[460] Keller.

[461] Ettinger writes, 'the matrixial viewpoint is a priori one of the several.' See Bracha Lichtenberg Ettinger, pp. 105–6.

[462] Heath, p. 36.

[463] Malvern, p. 117.

and ontological values of a rationality dominant in the nation-state.'[464] The benefits of identification include tangible progress such as access to safe abortion and contraception, equal pay, professional recognition and so on. Gaining access to the time of linear history requires certain conceptual formations and limitations of thinking about women. Kristeva writes that in the demand that all of these benefits are accessible, this current in feminism '*globalizes* the problems of women of different milieux, ages, civilisations, or simply of varying psychic structures.' Furthermore, and crucially for the wider conversation about feminist exhibition models, Kristeva explicitly stated that 'a consideration of *generations* of women can only be conceived of in this global way as a succession, as a progression in the accomplishment of the initial program mapped out by its founders.'[465]

Kristeva also articulated a concept of monumental time, on the one hand cyclic and marked by 'regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance.*' [466] On the other hand, monumental time is 'a massive presence of a monumental temporality, without cleavage or escape, which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word "temporality" hardly fits: All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space...'[467] A specific theoretical tendency in feminist thought notably in France rejects 'equal rights' feminism in favour of a deeper consideration of the monumental temporality of phallologocentrism inscribed in language and subjectivity's formations of sexual difference.

Kristeva argued that these two attitudes—'*insertion* into history and the radical *refusal* of the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time,' give rise to 'contributions as well as dangers.'[468] She proposed a third resolution to the risks and unproductive tendencies of either attitude in the form of 'another generation as another space.'[469] This no longer implied a chronology or succession of feminists, but a signifying space, 'a both corporeal and desiring mental space' which does not exclude, but allows for the '*parallel* existence of all three in the same historical time, or even that they be interwoven one with the other.'[470] The form of 'this adventure' would be 'aesthetic practices,' Kristeva argued,

> In order to bring out—along with the *singularity* of each person's possible identifications (with atoms, e.g., stretching from the family to the stars)—the relativity of his/her symbolic as well as biological existence, according to the variation of his/her specific symbolic capacities.[471]

Furthermore, Kristeva emphasised the ethical responsibility 'with which all will immediately face of putting this fluidity into play against the threats of death which are unavoidable whenever an

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[464] Julia Kristeva, 'Women's Time', trans. by Alice Jardine and Harry Blake, *Signs*, 7 (1981), 13–35 (p. 19).
[465] Kristeva, p. 19.
[466] Kristeva, p. 16.
[467] Kristeva, p. 17.
[468] Kristeva, p. 20.
[469] Kristeva, p. 33.
[470] Kristeva, p. 33.
[471] Kristeva, p. 35.

inside and an outside, a self and an other, one group and another are constituted.'[472] This conclusion very clearly states the centrality of the ethical notion of responsibility to the other to avoid the destructive consequences of dealing with differences in ways that negate, repress or marginalise.

In Griselda Pollock's contribution to the catalogue of *Inside the Visible,* titled 'Inscriptions in the Feminine,' (1996), she explained that this third space in Kristeva

> [D]oes not imply some futuristic androgyny that will erase sexual specificity. It sets us on a path to imagine ourselves outside of sexual dimorphism. It is in this sense that the feminine can function of and for itself, and also as the dissidence that disturbs the rule of phallocentrism, radically realigning culture and its relations of difference.[473]

Kristeva's notion of aesthetic practices as a site of the multiple alignments of the feminine related strongly to *Inside the Visible.* The exhibition featured work by artists that was difficult to decipher, Pollock explained,

> [B]ecause it operates on this edge, dispersing identity, inventing more bodies and masks, hybridizing the genders, in a radical poetics of difference that is feminine not through depositing some gendered essences but through rupturing the phallic norms of fixed gender, fixed identity, fixed sexualities, fixed boundaries.[474]

In 2010, a renewed focus on 'Women's Time' was posed, but with a different emphasis that called the efficacy of Kristeva's intervention into question. Professor of French and Comparative Literature Emily Apter wrote in her text '"Women's Time" in Theory' that 'it is women's time, again, in feminist theory.'[475] She argued that 'it is precisely the "dated" character of Kristeva's *temps des femmes* that matters, for it describes the anachronistic resurgence of "seventies theory" in the guise of feminist theory now, itself focused on time and the politics of periodicity.'[476]

In 2013, Sue Malvern argues that *Inside the Visible* reveals a focus on cyclical temporality or repetition that is part of a wider trend in feminist curating from the late 1970s to the 1980s, 1996 and 2007, although the twenty-first century projects were slightly different in focus, particularly *WACK!* which was 'self-evidently a historical survey of women's art and feminism spanning the period 1965-80, pitching its project as a landmark exhibition to rival *Inside the Visible.*'[477] Even if Cornelia Butler as curator of *WACK!* cited the influence of *Inside the Visible*,[478] I would argue that their projects are too different to align this closely in analysis. Nevertheless Malvern groups these exhibitions together on the grounds that they look back historically to past iterations of feminist activity, along with de Zegher and art historian Carol Armstrong's edited volume *Women Artists at the Millennium* (2006) which for Malvern 'sought to establish a canon of feminist practitioners which overlapped with the

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[472] Kristeva, p. 35.

[473] Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 76.

[474] Pollock, 'Inscriptions in the Feminine', p. 76.

[475] Emily Apter, '"Women"s Time' in Theory', *differences*, 21 (2010), 1–18 (p. 1) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/10407391-2009-013>.

[476] Apter, p. 17.

[477] Malvern, p. 116.

[478] Cornelia Butler, 'Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria', in *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2007), pp. 14–23 (pp. 20–21).

selection at *documenta 12* but had already been effectively endorsed by *Inside the Visible.*'[479] Malvern argues that time is clearly at issue for contemporary feminism, but that 'Women's Time', specifically can be thought of as outdated. She writes,

> What if, Apter argues, Kristeva's 'Women's Time' was understood as démodé, anachronistic and obsolescent though not without the charm of nostalgia? The implication would be that *Inside the Visible,* as a project exemplifying 'Women's Time', is also démodé, alongside the 2007 projects which were repetitions and revisions of earlier feminist curatorial moments. If such texts and projects are démodé, feminism would need to take on rethinking periodisation, reconsidering the contingent and provisional, the relationship between past and future, between generations of feminism.[480]

This leads Malvern to her final concluding comment that '*Inside the Visible, Sexual Politics, WACK!* and *Global Feminisms* would have had their moment and future of feminist curating, if it is to have a new future, would need to have unshackled itself from its past.'[481] I suggest that the reason why Malvern is able to make such a statement is because she misreads *Inside the Visible* as an instance of monumental time. She states this herself when she writes,

> Kristeva's 'Women's Time' is not cited in *Inside the Visible,* although her theories of abjection are. Yet *Inside the Visible* with its investigation of cyclical time and repetition, its rejection of linear art histories, its interest in matrices and its explorations of resistances to language seems like an exploration of the temporalities of female subjectivity, as Kristeva characterises them, as well as an exemplary project of second generation feminism.[482]

The fact is that 'Women's Time' *is* cited in the catalogue of *Inside the Visible* in one of its introductions. Pollock offers an exploration of the exhibition in relation to Kristeva's 'generation as a signifying space' which was posed in 1981 as a resolution to the oppositionality of linear time and monumental time. *Inside the Visible* is never posited as a 'temporality of female subjectivity' as Malvern suggests, although de Zegher does convey the importance of cyclical history when she writes in her catalogue introduction that the exhibition focuses on 'several recurrent cycles, rather than a linear survey with its investment in artistic originality and genealogies,' which may explain Malvern's misreading. However Pollock makes a clarification later in her own introduction. This misreading enables Malvern to diagnose *Inside the Visible* as an instance of feminist curating characterised by cyclical temporality or repetition in the Kristevan sense, which could be construed as always repeating past forms rather than innovating by looking to the future.[483]

There are two problems with this misreading. The first problem is that by declaring Kristeva's text 'Women's Time' as démodé or outdated, Malvern banishes its efficacy, or capacity to produce effects, to the past. This to my mind is vividly evocative of Kristeva's own description of the only way women can relate to past generations in the time of linear history: 'a consideration of *generations*

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[479] *Women Artists at the Millennium* never stated any aim to produce a canon not least because this would be so far from de Zegher's ethos, so it is unclear why Malvern argues this. Malvern, p. 116.
[480] Malvern, p. 117.
[481] Malvern, p. 117.
[482] Malvern, p. 115.
[483] Malvern, p. 115.

of women can only be conceived of in this global way as a succession, as a progression in the accomplishment of the initial program mapped out by its founders.'[484] There is a contradiction in Malvern's use of Apter to dismiss Kristeva in *Inside the Visible* as 'obsolescent though not without the charm of nostalgia,' without engaging with Kristeva's own clear explanation of this gesture in 'Women's Time' which is the very text being denounced as fading in significance.[485]

The second problem stemming from Malvern's own implicit framework of linear time is that de Zegher's feminist practice of 1996 is made to evidence a tendency of contemporary feminist thinking to get stuck in a repetitive loop when its innovation was in fact to resist this kind of repression and misreading. Malvern is broadly correct that *Inside the Visible* looked back through the twentieth century. But the whole premise of *Inside the Visible* was the possibility of rethinking the linear time of art history, moving away from the favoured form of modernist progression, but seeing artistic practices as relating to historical time and its politics: fascism in the 1930s, new social movements in the 1960s, the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall in the 1990s, and multiple moments of decolonisation in the twentieth century. At the same time, however, de Zegher also identified certain elements of continuity that operate on a different time-scale around the body, difference, subjectivity and language, which are not universalised but situated in geopolitical and personal experience. This double-focus rethinks the historical political time of women artists and also finds non-essential grounds for tracing connections and differences across time through certain kinds of practice, forms and concerns. By not permitting this possibility to register at the performative level of writing exhibition histories, Malvern thus shuts herself—and her readers—off to the transformative effect of *Inside the Visible* to prompt a reimagining of how women artists (and even curators) relate to history but also what kinds of affinities and continuities they, and their work, might have with others.

Inside the Visible may be read in Kristevan terms as creating a space beyond the opposition of linear history and essential femininity. But what I hope my framing of the exhibition makes visible is that the act of caring is a creating of a future without oppression and marginalisation if, and only if, the practices are read in such terms.

In *Inside the Visible,* de Zegher explained that the selected artists' 'need to deconstruct existing representation codes is a search for "beginnings",' crucially not in the sense of starting completely anew, rejecting what has gone before, as Malvern proposes. Instead de Zegher saw *Inside the Visible* working in the same vein as Edward Said's notion:

> Beginning is making or producing difference; but difference which is the result of combining the already-familiar with the fertile novelty of human work in language. Beginning is basically an activity which ultimately implies return and repetition rather than simple linear accomplishment; beginning and beginning-again are historical whereas origins are divine...[486]

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[484] Kristeva, p. 19.
[485] Malvern, p. 117.
[486] CDZ p23

In Said's sense of beginning, curatorial practice with a feminist commitment would not dismiss earlier practices on the circular argument that they are anachronistic, because there is not only a historical responsibility to understand past interventions and recognise their longevity, but also a necessity to use the resources they offer and their modes of operating that are already intelligible and effective, even taking into consideration cultural or discursive shifts in historical time. In this way, relationality concerned with looking back and acknowledging and reinscribing past relations is a productive ethical gesture.

De Zegher emphasised this further in her interview with Katy Deepwell in 1996, although she was speaking about artists whose careers developed from the 1970s:

> They cut away from... from what had happened in the immediate past to establish a new beginning. But you cannot say that nothing happened before. If you do this, you need to see, you are stabilising only one beginning when there are in fact many others. Where to begin and the idea of beginnings are extremely important notions as they imply repetition but what many of these women did was position themselves at an origin.[487]

Denying the transformative effects and productiveness of other practices closes down and negates efficacy. Furthermore the gesture of rejection blocks the capacity inherent in transformative encounters to ethicise, that is, to instil in others an understanding that they have ethical capacities to respond to others, to generate productive spaces, knowledge and encounters themselves. As Kristeva wrote in 1981, ethical responsibility is the key 'which all will immediately face of putting this fluidity into play against the threats of death which are unavoidable whenever an inside and an outside, a self and an other, one group and another are constituted.'[488] Far from being repetitive, the ethicising effect of care has its own futurity, because it anticipates and pre-empts threatening possibilities of neglect, repression and marginalisation, and embeds the conditions for survival, adaption and transformation in the future.

For this reason, I suggest that a relational framework grounded in ethics is needed in the discourse on curating, including its feminist sites. In this case study I have tried to show that de Zegher's sensitivity to relations and relationality in *Inside the Visible* in particular enable generative ways of thinking and encountering 'others'. Whether these 'others' are artworks, artists and their practices, cultural *milieux* or geo-political positions, philosophical ideas or political priorities, I suggest it is important to recognise curatorial strategies that do not negate, disempower, silence or banalise by default, but that recognise and allow for difference as a relational dynamic. I have argued for a way of reading that recognises the exhibition, and affiliated curatorial practices, as a differentiated exercise in *curare*. That is, a frame through which the exhibition can be seen as a signifying space which perhaps operates on multiple levels, from the level of political statement and discursive intervention, to a deep stratum of subjectivity. I propose that these interweave and condition the capacity to instigate transformative effects. The curatorial design and instigation of

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[487] Deepwell and de Zegher.
[488] Kristeva, p. 35.

these may be seen as acts of care which span textual, social, and affective modes of practice. From here I shall turn to another site of curatorial practice to investigate these possibilities in further depth.

Part Two

Chapter Five: The curatorial practice of Brenda L Croft and *fluent* (1997)

In 1997, Brenda L Croft co-curated the exhibition *fluent* for the Australian Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale. This exhibition and its curatorial practice form the focus of Part Two, the second case study. As an intervention into the international art world represented by Venice Biennale, *fluent* and Croft's practice raise a series of issues within the core field of feminist curatorial practices and the ethical by simultaneously addressing a specific situation within Australia with regard to its Indigenous and 'settler' communities, and posing an international question of how to represent practices with local specificities on the global stage. Conceptually, practically and historically, *fluent* requires a careful reading of its politics of curation, which I present in this chapter. Here I shall follow a similar pattern to Chapter Three in the first case study, and begin with a critical career overview of Brenda L Croft, before addressing the exhibition *fluent* as text through the archive, simultaneously reading for patterns of responsibilities and acts of care.

I feel it necessary however, to firstly state the cultural specificity of responsibility and care, along with relationality and ethicality, in Indigenous practice so as not to elide these concepts with their usage in the previous case study. At the same time I am not compelled to over-state their 'difference' and reinforce essentialism, or overanalyse their appearance as concepts and over-determine the possible ways they may emerge in practice. I initially learned about Australian Indigenous conceptions of ethicality and relationality through the research ethics process. While the University of Leeds Research Ethics policy does not specifically address the issue of research with Indigenous participants, it does direct researchers engaging in international research to adhere to research ethics policies and guidelines that govern research in the relevant countries. I therefore consulted the document *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Indigenous Studies* (2000) or *GERIS,* produced by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), and the related document *Keeping Research on Track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People about health research ethics* (2006) co-produced by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Health Ethics Committee (AHEC) in consultation with Indigenous communities and representatives. Although this second document is focussed on health research ethics, the section 'Our Most Important Values' provided me with a clear insight into the scope of relationality in Indigenous systems of ethics and culture. Six core values are said to be common to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; these are described as follows:

Spirit and Integrity

This is the most important value that joins all our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' values together. The first part, Spirit, is about the on-going connection (continuity) between our past, current and future generations. The second part, Integrity, is about the respectful and honourable behaviours that hold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and cultures together.

Reciprocity

Our way of shared responsibility and obligation is based on our diverse kinship networks. This process in our communities keeps our ways of living and family relationships strong. These responsibilities also extend to the care of the land, animals and country and involve sharing benefits from the air, land and sea, redistribution of income, and sharing food and housing.

Respect

Respect for each other's dignity and individual ways of living is the basis of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live. Within our cultures, respect strengthens dignity, and dignity strengthens respect. A respectful relationship encourages trust and co-operation. Strong culture is built on respect and trust, and a strong culture encourages dignity and recognition, and provides a caring and sharing environment.

Equality

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples recognise the equal value of all individuals. One of the ways that this is shown is in our commitment to fairness and justice. Equality affirms and recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to be different.

Survival and protection

We continue to protect our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, languages and identity. Recognition of our shared cultural identity, which is based on our shared values, is a significant strength.

Responsibility

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognise the same most important (core) responsibilities. These responsibilities involve country, kinship bonds, caring for others, and the maintenance of cultural and spiritual awareness. The main responsibility is to do no harm to any person, or any place. Sometimes these responsibilities may be shared so that others may also be held accountable.[489]

Although *Keeping Research on Track* presents a certain formalisation of Indigenous conceptions of ethical practice in the textual form of an official document, it does result from consultation and therefore represents co-authorship and institutional recognition of Indigenous rights, responsibilities and expectations in research relationships. From the extract above I learned about the prominence, depth and breadth of relationality not (only) as an abstract ethical principle or analytical term, but as a mode of practice that describes the many continuities and connections between and across different facets of Indigenous culture/s. This learning experience shaped the way I understand and read for care, relationality, ethicality and responsibility in the archive of *fluent* and Croft's practice.

Brenda L Croft as curatorial agent

In this section, I shall provide a detailed overview of Brenda Croft's curatorial career from her early involvement in community projects to her changing roles as a professional independent curator, in order to contextualise *fluent* within Croft's wider practice. By showing the development of her career against the broader history of socio-political change in Australia, I also aim to show what agency was available to her in 1997.

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[489] 'Keeping Research on Track: A Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples about Health Research Ethics' (National Health and Medical Research Council, 2006), p. 8.

In 2010, Croft presented a paper at the *Cairns Indigenous Art Fair* (CIAF) in Queensland, Australia, titled 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?' in which she critically reflected on her varied career path as a means of responding to the question of whether the Indigenous art 'bubble has burst', a notion repeatedly raised in the art press.[490] In response to this frequent interjection that insinuates the inevitability of Aboriginal culture dying, Croft drew together her reflections and analyses of the longstanding and ongoing action she has taken in different forms to challenge and reconfigure this entrenched ideology. This talk is the primary source of up-to-date information on Croft's career path; however I also draw on numerous versions of her *Curriculum Vitae*. In 2012, I also conducted an interview with Croft via email about *fluent* in particular: its practicalities and meanings, and its wider milieu. I have also had piecemeal email correspondence with Croft on aspects of her work. In this section I therefore structure the biography chronologically, although like de Zegher's biography, it is inflected by narration and hindsight. I focus on Croft's curatorial work because of the scope of my research project, but I also focus on aspects of her artistic practice because the two are interrelated.[491]

Brenda L Croft is a prolific artist and curator, and a member of the Gurindji/Malgnin/Mutpurra peoples, from the Kalkaringi/Daguragu/Limbunya communities in the Northern Territory (NT), Australia. To offer some family background, her mother was a white Australian woman and her father 'was a member of the Stolen Generations, removed from his family as a toddler by the police, under the policies of the day in the mid-1920s.'[492] Until the age of thirteen he lived in children's homes in the NT, including the Kahlin Compound in Darwin and the Bungalow Half Caste Children's Home in Alice Springs.[493] He then won a scholarship that was rarely open to Aboriginal children, which made it possible for him to attend a boarding school in Queensland (QLD), in Charters Towers. Croft explains that her father was 'possibly the first Aboriginal person to attend university in the early 1940s. But he left before graduating to join the army at the beginning of World War Two.' Her mother was 'very much from a working class background,' leaving school 'in her early to mid teens [... Later] she eventually completed her HSC [Higher School Certificate] in her mid forties, by which time she was a mother of three children.'[494]

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490 See for example the strapline 'The bubble seems to have burst for Aboriginal art - but that may be no bad thing, says Germaine Greer' for the article by Germaine Greer, 'Can You Tell What It's Worth Yet?', *the Guardian*, 2005 <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2005/nov/09/art.australia> [accessed 26 November 2013].

491 More is published on Croft's artistic practice than curatorial practice. See Hetti Perkins, *Art + Soul* (Carlton, Vic.: Miegunyah Press, 2010).

492 Brenda L Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?' (presented at the Cairns Indigenous Art Fair, Cairns, QLD, Australia: Queensland Government: Arts Queensland, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, 2010).

493 Hear the radio program 'Remembering Kahlin Compound', 2010 in which a woman called Marjorie Daly, who grew up there, remembers how children were not known by names but numbers. <http://www.abc.net.au/local/photos/2010/06/02/2916638.htm> [accessed 26 November 2012].

494 Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

Brenda L Croft was born in Perth in 1964, and lived in numerous places around Australia including Canberra. In 1984, she began an undergraduate degree at the Sydney College of the Arts studying photography, 'before doing what so many of my Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers in Sydney did at the time: got active in the community... a great community [characterised by] cultural and political action.' She 'jumped in feet first, [taking] photos of demonstrations, cultural events, friends and colleagues, being inspired by artist colleagues, and friends, such as the late Michael Riley, Tracey [Moffatt], Avril [Quaill] and many others.'[495] Croft worked at a number of community-based organisations including Radio Redfern. She has said, 'there were no rules, no boundaries, we didn't know what we were doing really; we just knew that we had to do something, anything.'[496]

This 'not-knowing' and drive to 'do something, anything' perhaps reflects the energy and enthusiasm of youth and community generally, but is also telling of a certain moment in Australian and even international history. It can be seen as emblematic of the grassroots energy of the 1980s that manifested in activism and the renewed drive of underrepresented political issues into visibility. These included the high rate of Aboriginal incarceration and death in prisons and police lockups, and the falsity of the ongoing legal myth '*terra nullius*' or 'empty land' which continued to prevent the recognition of land rights.[497]

Croft first exhibited her artwork in the *National Aborigines Day Observance Committee (NADOC) '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers* at the Aboriginal Artists Gallery, Sydney.[498] NADOC is now known as National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC), the official name for the week of celebrations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures held in July every year, when the contributions of Indigenous Australians in various fields are recognised nationally.[499] Following the *NADOC '86* exhibition, Croft was invited to be a founding member of Sydney organisation Boomalli Artist Cooperative (originally Ko-operative) in 1987.[500]

Boomalli Artist Cooperative was named for the phrase 'to strike', 'to make a mark', 'to fight back' and 'to light up' in the local Kamilaroi, Bundjalung and Wiradjuri languages.[501] It was originally founded to '[challenge] common misconceptions about urban-based Aboriginal art and culture and [celebrate] the diversity of Indigenous artistic expression in Australia.'[502] Artist and curator Jonathan Jones curated an exhibition of works from the permanent collection at the Art

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[495] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

[496] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

[497] See http://reconciliaction.org.au/nsw/education-kit/history/#80s

[498] Brenda L Croft, 'Brenda L Croft', *Retake, NGA*, 1998 <http://nga.gov.au/Retake/artists/00000002.htm>.

[499] Its historical roots are in Aboriginal rights groups that were in existence before the 1920s, see http://www.naidoc.org.au/about/naidoc-history/

[500] Jonathan Jones writes that Boomalli's founding members largely met while undertaking tertiary art education or exhibiting together in forerunning projects such as *Contemporary Aboriginal art* in 1983, *Koorie art '84*, *NADOC '86 Exhibition of Aboriginal and Islander Photographers* and *Urban Koories* in 1986 Jonathan Jones, *Boomalli: 20 Years On* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2007), p. 2.

[501] 'History', *Biennale of Sydney* <http://www.biennaleofsydney.com.au/about-us/history/> [accessed 18 November 2013].

[502] 'History'.

Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in 2007 called *Boomalli: 20 Years On*, which took stock of Boomalli's cultural significance.[503] Jones wrote that the co-operative was founded 'by what could only be described as Sydney's Black avant-garde', whose founding members included Croft, along with Euphemia Bostock, Bronwyn Bancroft, Fiona Foley, Fernanda Martins, Arone Raymond Meeks, Avril Quaill, Jeffery Samuels and 'cultural mavericks' Michael Riley and Tracey Moffatt.[504] In the catalogue produced for the event, Jones wrote:

> Urban Aboriginal culture has largely been seen as illegitimate, not the exciting culmination of bi-culturalism but as the bastard half-caste with the only perceived redeeming feature being that of assimilation. It is this lack of acknowledgment, this constant assault, and the notion that urban Aboriginal culture is not authentic or traditional that led to the formation of one of Australia's longest running, Black or white, artist co-operatives.[505]

Where Jones suggests the status of urban Aboriginal culture is misperceived and misrepresented as 'bastard' and 'half-caste', he makes reference to the long history in Australia of state-enforced assimilation, which was implemented from the late nineteenth century through to the late twentieth century. The policy of removing children from their families and communities, who are now known as the Stolen Generations, was founded on social Darwinism and was used to justify the stealing of Aboriginal children from their families, and their institutionalisation into either state care or white foster families, in order to 'breed out' Aboriginality.[506] It attempted to destroy Aboriginal cultures, languages and connections to Country. The Labor Government made an official apology on behalf of the nation in 2008, before Jones's statements were made; but arguably the implications of assimilation persist in popular understandings of Aboriginal culture today. Drawing on this history, Jones's point is that Aboriginal cultures are not 'diluted' just because they engage with the contemporary world; this is a myth that ties in with the urban/desert paradigm, where 'urban artists' are seen as 'corrupted' in some way, whereas 'desert artists' are seen as 'authentic', as he says.[507]

Looking further back before the national apology, the timing of Boomalli's founding years coincided with Australia's Bicentenary in 1988, 200 years after the arrival of the First Fleet in Sydney. For white Australia the Bicentenary was largely a celebration of the first milestone in the history of the nation. For Indigenous people it was a time for mourning and resistance. Looking back through the archive, Croft and her colleagues' work has been formative in a renewed understanding of

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[503] Jones, born 1978, is currently curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art at the AGNSW, and has also worked at Boomalli.

[504] Jones, p. 3.

[505] Jones, p. 3.

[506] 'To Remove and Protect: Laws That Changed Aboriginal Lives: Legislations', *Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*, 2013.

[507] This paradigm and ensuing debates on assimilation and appropriation have for decades been the major discursive formations shaping the field of contemporary art in which contemporary Indigenous artists participate. I pick up this below and in the next chapter.

that moment, in the way it challenged the national narratives of discovery, exploration, and settlement.[508]

The plurality and tensions of the different historical accounts was explored in the 2008 exhibition *Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770*, an exhibition curated by Croft's colleague Ace Bourke. Bourke gathered together numerous archival and artistic stories,

Figure 17. *Michael Watson: Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January 1988* by Brenda L Croft, 1988. Gelatin silver photograph. Copyright Brenda L Croft. Licensed by Viscopy. Courtesy the artist.

images and critical interpretations of the events of 1770 onwards. Reflecting on his involvement with the 'extraordinary generation' of emerging curators including Croft, he wrote in the exhibition catalogue that he has always been especially interested in works that specifically address Indigenous/settler first encounters as they have provided an Aboriginal perspective which is markedly absent from historical accounts. Bourke explained that in the lead up to the Bicentennial of 1988 there was an unprecedented interest and growing awareness of Aboriginal issues and sensitivities.[509] Bourke's chosen illustration is a photograph taken by Croft on 26 January, 1988 titled *Michael Watson: Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, Invasion Day, 26 January 1988*, taken in

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[508] An Indigenous audience member at the symposium *Aboriginal Art: It's a White Thing* at the Sydney Opera House in 2012 remarked that Cook's 'discovery' and the arrival of the First Fleet foregrounded the *unsettlement* of Australia, which had been overwhelmingly peaceful and settled for millennia prior.

[509] Ace Bourke, 'Lines in the Sand', in *Lines in the Sand: Botany Bay Stories from 1770* (Sydney: Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2008), pp. 23–29 (p. 23).

Redfern, where Boomalli was originally located and for a long time a main hub of the Aboriginal community in Sydney (Figure 17). In 2010, Croft wrote about the day she took the photograph,

> A year of incredible protest action commenced at 12.01 am on 1 January 1988. Radio Redfern (Aboriginal Radio), where Michael Watson and I worked, began broadcasting 24 hours a day, instead of a few hours each week. This community action was taken in support of Aboriginal history, rights and recognition against the onslaught of 'celebration of a nation' that was purportedly 'only 200 years young'—that is 200 years of European settlement. Slogans such as 'White Australia has a Black history', 'Treaty '88', 'Cook Who, Cuck-oo' were supported by huge protest marches in cities and towns around the country.
>
> Radio Redfern became the hub and heart of protest action in Sydney during the lead-up to Australia Day—better known to Indigenous people and their supporters as Invasion Day—26 January. The day dawned with great anticipation with tens of thousands of people having come to Sydney for the march. In between recording interviews with protest marchers for Radio Redfern, I took photographs with my trusty old Nikon SLR camera. I ran into Michael on the march to the city. The image was not staged, I just asked Michael if I could take his photograph, as a friend and as a proud Aboriginal man solidly standing his ground. It was very quick, he turned to face me, raised his arms with no direction from me and I pressed the shutter. That was it, and I was off up the road taking more pictures and interviewing people. I love the image for Michael's stance and his slight smile, his thonged feet against the backdrop of truncated torsos of white residents on their verandahs watching the passing parade of thousands chanting 'What do we want?' 'Land rights!' 'When do we want them?' 'Now!'[510]

Croft's photograph of Michael Watson captures the anti-colonial spirit of the times, and as such it can be read as both as historical evidence of the increasingly public face of that politics, as well as exemplary of certain artistic shifts in the field of Australian art that collectively was becoming more exposed and sensitised to, and politicised about the repression of Aboriginal voices in history.

To return to Jonathan Jones's historicisation of Boomalli, he argues that it would in time develop into '...an Aboriginal initiative, an example of self determination [that] has developed substantially in not only supporting artists but in the professional development of Indigenous arts workers with many becoming key players within the industry,' exemplified by Croft.[511] Reflecting on this era, Croft as remarks how experience at all of these organisations was formative and interlinked:

> I was inspired by some of the most influential and pioneering indigenous artists, who paved the way for people like me, which I hope in some very small way I do for people who come after me. Boomalli started as a voluntarily staffed artist-run initiative where everyone pitched in organising shows, designing and making invitations for exhibitions, hanging the work, cleaning up afterwards, and from that initial idea of creating a working studio and exhibition space we found ourselves organising exhibitions for other Indigenous artists, from around the country.[512]

Echoing this sense of urgency and will to action generated by working collectively, the curator Djon Mundine, a mentor of Croft, said in 2011:

> We were part of a general movement in the 1970s and 1980s which put on exhibitions and tried to get Aboriginal art to be seen as an important part of Australian art. We were interested in institutional collections and how to get these to people in the community so they could see the history embodied in their objects. We tried to get museums to realise their responsibilities to

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[510] http://cs.nga.gov.au/Detail.cfm?IRN=96504

[511] Jones, p. 4.

[512] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

Aboriginal people. At the time, a lot of people were going into politics, sloganeering and making demands of government. We really thought about what we wanted, how we could make it happen, rather than burning down a museum or something.[513]

In Mundine's view, those who worked in, or were involved in the artistic/curatorial field of the 1980s were in a position to develop what we might now recognise as artistic and/or emergent curatorial *practices*. Different from an authorship model where artists/curators express singular statements that audiences passively receive, Indigenous artists and curators were increasingly producing multi-layered cultural texts that operated (and continue to operate) on different levels, where authorial intention as a concept cannot contain the interweaving strategies of practice that find traction in different registers of the dynamic cultural and socio-political field. Mundine sees a degree of bifurcation within the broader group of people who wanted to bring about change in the representation of Aboriginal people and the wider Australian consciousness. On the one hand there was the option to 'burn down a museum or something,' which might be a metaphor; but there is a possibility that resistance might have taken this form, not unlike the storming of the Bastille for example. On the other hand, Mundine describes the aim of getting 'Aboriginal art to be seen as an important part of Australian art,' with the two way objective of connecting Aboriginal communities to institutional collections, and simultaneously trying to 'get museums to realise their responsibilities to Aboriginal people.' In this point Mundine reflects on his own career path; he was not involved with Boomalli and is not speaking for Croft. While we could replace Mundine's evocation of 'the museum' with 'institutional histories of art', 'art galleries', and so on to help position Croft's early work to an extent insofar as Boomalli posed a general intervention into these dominant discursive sites, clearly Boomalli was established as an alternative, Aboriginal-run space, with the explicit remit to support Aboriginal artists whose practice fell outside the scope of what was widely recognised to comprise 'Aboriginal art.' Croft's work following Boomalli, however, would move into the 'mainstream' established institution. So while Croft may have 'cut her teeth' in radical grassroots activism in the 1980s, at the same time the moment nurtured a different kind of intellectual engagement with the authoritative and almost exclusively non-Indigenous 'mainstream art world'. To clarify this point, Mundine adds to his comments above,

> Curating is not just a bit of window dressing. It's about how people would like to see themselves and allowing others to understand things clearly. We were in a special position because of our education and the time in history, but you can't just be ambitious, blunt bastards.[514]

Mundine in 2011 recalls that in that 1980s, a notion of curating as a strategic practice did begin to gather steam, at the same moment that it was sharpened by a political edge. However at the time, for Croft, the curatorial was as yet partially unknown. Like de Zegher, Croft began curating by default. She has said,

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[513] Franchesca Cubillo and Djon Mundine, 'The Two of Us', *Arts Yarn Up*, Autumn (2011), 22–23 (p. 23).

[514] Cubillo and Mundine, p. 23.

> With no gain plan I found myself falling into curatorial work. Even though I had little idea what a curator did. I realised early on that I had an affinity for exhibition organisation, for administration, for writing grant applications, for learning how to design and compile catalogues, for working with artists, documenting exhibitions and projects...[515]

Croft's artistic career continued to gain momentum alongside her curatorial work, with each facet enabling and enriching the other. In 1990, Croft became General Manager (formerly Coordinator) of Boomalli, a position she held for six years.[516] Among other exhibitions, Croft's artwork was included in the *Aboriginal Women's Exhibition* at the AGNSW and *Kudjeris* at Boomalli in 1991, evidencing a strong early commitment to Aboriginal women's experiences and representations. She made and exhibited artwork in France and Britain, and was able to network internationally on behalf of Boomalli.[517] She has reflected that 'those networks that started like small drops in a pool 25 years ago have generated ripples across the arts and cultural industries and not just here in Australia but also here and overseas.'[518] One particular example is Croft's relationship with Hetti Perkins, with whom she later co-curated *fluent.*

> When Fiona Foley invited Hetti Perkins to be Fiona's replacement as exhibitions coordinator in 1992, Hetti and I developed a great working partnership and even closer friendship, which exists to this day. Since that time, even though we left Boomalli in 1995 and 1996 respectively, we've worked on many projects here and overseas.[519]

In 1993 Croft undertook a residency at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Alberta, Canada. Her work was shown in the inaugural Johannesburg Biennale titled *AFRICUS* in 1995 following the end of apartheid: 'even though I participated as an artist, I was very interested in the curatorial development of it, and how things like that got established.'[520] In the same year she completed a Master of Art Administration at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales: 'as part of the coursework, I did an internship at the National Gallery of Australia [NGA] in '92 working with then-senior curator of Aboriginal art, Wally Caruana, who was a mentor and remains a close friend.'[521]

This was a particularly difficult period for Croft as she suffered the loss of two close family members in the mid-1990s. 1996 was also the thirty-year anniversary of the Walk Off at Wave Hill Station on Gurindji land in the NT, the first strike to

> [A]ttract wide public support within Australia for Land Rights which led to the 1972 Labour Party's policy on Land Rights and the enactment of the 1976 *Aboriginal Land Rights (NT) Act* – the first statutory recognition of the inalienable right Indigenous people have to [the] land.[522]

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[515] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
[516] Croft, 'Brenda L Croft'.
[517] Croft, 'Brenda L Croft'.
[518] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
[519] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
[520] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
[521] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
[522] http://reconciliaction.org.au/nsw/education-kit/history/#80s

In 1996, the Wik case found that native title was not extinguished by pastoral leases, which was another victory for land rights, however this time was also marked by setbacks in the form of 'hysterical attacks from farmers and conservative leaders, who demanded that native title be extinguished, or wiped out, on pastoral leases altogether,' the election of the Howard government which wound back many land rights achievements, and the racist 'white Australia' politics of the One Nation Party leader Pauline Hanson.[523] Croft travelled overseas for a residency at the Australia Council Greene Street Studio in New York in 1996-7, and also used the opportunity to promote *fluent,* to be held at the 47th Venice Biennale in 1997.

After *fluent,* Croft returned to Australia in late 1997, and worked freelance as an artist, writer, lecturer and consultant in Sydney. Following an artist residency in Perth in 1998, she relocated there in 1999, and was Curator of Indigenous Art at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (AGWA) until 2002. This was slightly later than *Inside the Visible*'s installation at AGWA. While there, 'and with institutional government support, [Croft] assisted in the facilitation and establishment an Indigenous assistant curatorial traineeship, to enable further indigenous employment at the gallery,'[524] a significant step given the persistent gap between Aboriginal and other curatorial voices.

Croft 'negotiated leave without pay from AGWA to curate *Beyond the Pale: Contemporary Indigenous Art*, for the 2000 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia.'(AGSA)[525] There she worked with Ron Radford, then-director of AGSA, who became a mentor, 'more so when he became director at the NGA in 2005 where [Croft] had been working since leaving Perth in 2002.'[526] She explains how ten years after her internship at the gallery, she became the first Indigenous person to head the Indigenous Art department, becoming Senior Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art.[527] She continued to work on Aboriginal employment in the sector, and in her time at the NGA the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art department expanded to four full-time positions, with three volunteer internships. Together with Perkins, Croft co-curated the Australian Indigenous Art Commission at the Musee du Quai Branly, in Paris in 2006. The following year, Croft established the National Indigenous Art Triennial, the inaugural exhibition of which was titled *Culture Warriors*, which celebrated the 25th anniversary of the NGA in 2007.[528]

According to Croft, *Culture Warriors* developed from *Beyond the Pale*, which in turn grew from diverse facets of art and restoration undertaken since the mid 1980s. Despite its national and international prominence, Croft recounts how the NGA refused to fund her travel and support her input into the Washington DC installation:

> Irrespective of having risen to the most senior indigenous curatorial position in the country, at arguably the nation's premier fine arts institution, I was still expected to be voiceless, nameless

523 http://reconciliaction.org.au/nsw/education-kit/history/#80s
524 Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
525 Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
526 Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
527 Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.
528 Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

and invisible. I question whether this would have been imposed upon a non-Indigenous colleague of similar standing and experience.[529]

Croft relocated to Adelaide to lecture full time in art and design at the University of South Australia, and in 2009 she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sydney for her contributions to Aboriginal art. However she soon felt she had lost touch with her original aims of supporting Indigenous artists, explaining that she 'felt complicit in the industry that liberationist/liberation artist Richard Bell has challengingly labelled "an industry for white people" not Aboriginal people.'[530] Speaking of the wider industry, Croft argues that 'we might continue to be in the midst of it, but we are simultaneously still on the periphery, fringe dwellers, no matter what is stated. It's a complicated thing with no simple answers.'[531]

In 2011, Croft curated the exhibition *Stop(the)Gap: International Indigenous Art in Motion* at the Samstag Museum of Art in Adelaide, and in 2012, she joined the National Institute for Experimental Arts at the College of Fine Arts in Sydney as a senior research fellow, funded by an Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous Award. Her project aims to develop an innovative historical account of Gurindji experience through the production of visual, ethnographic and archival research.

History of the co-curators' practices

As the co-curators of *fluent,* Hetti Perkins and Victoria Lynn's respective practices were integral to the exhibition*,* and a longer historical view of both women's careers reveals an ongoing contribution to the discourse on Aboriginal and contemporary art by women. The sense of longer practices leading up to and then unfolding from *fluent* in 1997 works in the same way as the longer view of Brenda Croft's practice, except here they are kept more brief. Additionally, there is a need to situate Croft, Perkins and Lynn in relation to one another, because a wider, relational view of Croft's practice reveals ongoing collectivity, collaboration and mutual support as a snapshot of Croft's wider network of relations across her career, including but not limited to *fluent.*

Hetti Perkins is a high profile curator in Australia, from a well-known family who have achieved substantial accolades and made 'pioneering' contributions to Australian culture. Perkins was born in 1965 and is a member of the Eastern Arrernte and Kalkadoon communities. Her father was Dr Charlie Perkins, the famous activist who initiated the Freedom Ride with Reverend Ted Noffs, a bus tour of country New South Wales raising consciousness of civil rights for Aboriginal people,

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[529] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

[530] Croft here refers to the provocation by Richard Bell, who accepted the 2003 Telstra National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art Award wearing a t-shirt with the statement 'Aboriginal Art / It's a White Thing.' Bell's artwork *Bell's Theorem* expands on this notion, for further discussion see for example Margo Neale's article *Learning to be proppa : Aboriginal artists collective ProppaNOW.*

[531] Croft, 'Bursting Bubbles, or a Load of Hot Air?'.

protesting discrimination and poverty in 1965.[532] Perkins was the first Aboriginal man to graduate from university in Australia, in 1966, when he was also instrumental in establishing the Foundation for Aboriginal Affairs in Sydney which campaigned for land rights and other Aboriginal issues including the 1967 Referendum.[533] He was a part of the new Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972, and while campaigning at the community level he also moved into government. A biographical statement on the Charlie Perkins Foundation website states:

> His extraordinary achievements included appointments as Secretary, Department of Aboriginal Affairs; Chairman, Aboriginal Development Commission and Aboriginal Hostels Ltd. He was actively involved in Indigenous organisations wherever he lived. He was elected ATSIC Commissioner in both Alice Springs and Sydney. In 1987 he was awarded the Order of Australia.

Charlie Perkins had two daughters; Hetti Perkins and Rachel Perkins who is a well-known Australian film maker. Following an arts degree at the University of New South Wales and working with children in Alice Springs town camps, Hetti Perkins found her first job at Boomalli Artists Collective as Exhibitions Coordinator/Curator in 1992.

One of Perkins' first exhibitions was *Blakness: Blak City Culture!* (1994), co-curated by Clare Williamson at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne and supported by the Institute of New International Visual Arts (then inIVA). Even though Brenda Croft was also based at Boomalli, she was not featured as an artist in *Blakness*, although there was a discussion of her work and writing in the catalogue, especially her recent multimedia installation *Strange Fruit* (1994) 'that explored the implications and possibilities of "hybridity"', which had in common with the artists from *Blakness* a challenge to 'the criteria proposed by non-Aboriginal people such as skin colour in determining Aboriginality.'[534] The exhibition *Blakness* was in many ways a forerunner to *fluent,* challenging reductivist tropes prevailing in the contemporaneous representation of Aboriginal art, but also offering a critical space for other more productive lines of inquiry. The curatorial premise of *Blakness* was to examine the 'complex and contradictory urban environment' which sustained the work of an increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, and explore 'the possibilities of identity... postulat[ing]... the emergence of Blak City Culture',[535] following artist Destiny Deacon's reclamation of the term 'black' in an act of self-definition and expression.[536] Confronting and bypassing racist rhetoric about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the city, for example media representations of Aboriginal people as 'violent' and 'living in ghettoes', the co-curators instead highlighted the access to opportunities afforded by cities to artists, which

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[532] 'Timeline', *The Charlie Perkins Trust for Children and Students*
   <http://www.perkinstrust.com.au/timeline.html> [accessed 23 November 2013].

[533] http://reconciliaction.org.au/nsw/education-kit/history/#land

[534] Hetti Perkins, 'Introduction', in *Blakness: Blak City Culture!*, ed. by Clare Williamson and Hetti Perkins (Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1994), p. 24.

[535] Perkins, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[536] Perkins, 'Introduction', p. 20.

offered 'exposure to the spectrum of contemporary art practice and discourse.'[537] In the catalogue, Perkins asserted that,

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists will not cede to assimilationist pressure which attempts to manipulate their production. In line with the sophisticated nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art practice, our artists maintain a similarly sophisticated attitude that is interventionist rather than oppositional, pragmatic yet never apolitical.[538]

This line of resistance against renewed processes of cultural assimilation inherent in oppositional thinking fed directly into *fluent,* extending to it a strong claim for the contemporaneity, vitality and sophistication of Aboriginal art generally. The realisation of this idea in each exhibition differed, however. *Blakness* focussed specifically on Aboriginal art practices that negotiated the city and its affiliated stereotypes and tropes in the expanded form of the 'urban/desert' paradigm: the entrenched assumptions in contemporaneous concepts like hybridity, authenticity and so on. In response, the co-curators positioned contemporary Aboriginal artistic work coming from cities in relation to a network of other forms of cultural production: postcolonial critique, the work of Eva Hesse and Emily Kame Kngwarreye, *Dr Who* and U2 are a few examples of influences offered by the selected artists and curators in mini profiles illustrated by passport photos of them pulling funny faces. The co-curators explained that artists 'are conscious of and wise to postmodernisms's "deep and ambivalent fascination with difference", taking advantage of the opportunities which are created but refusing to speak only in their allotted space or be silenced once more when the agenda shifts.'[539] *fluent* did not disavow these fields of relation but focussed more on the materiality of selected works, not in a purely formalist framework but concerned with culturally-specific 'aesthetics'. Still, I would extend the description of artists as pragmatic to Perkins and Croft, who took the opportunity to curate the Australian Pavilion in 1997. In light of the overarching concept of the ethical, this act resonates with a notion of responsibility to make visible the work of Aboriginal people.

In the same year as *Blakness*, Perkins and Croft co-curated *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag* (1994), a collaborative project with Black British artist and curator Eddie Chambers (who had recently curated *Black people and the British Flag* in 1993), and also with Iniva and Boomalli. *True Colours* travelled to the Bluecoat Gallery, Liverpool; the South London Gallery; and the City Gallery, Leicester, UK. In many ways *True Colours* referenced *Blakness*: the catalogue essay, titled 'truths, myths and little white lies' directly confronted the histories of oppression, violence and misrepresentation of Aboriginal people in post-contact Australia. Croft and Perkins noted at the end of the catalogue essay,

> This essay takes a deliberately historical stance, as most internationally circulated 'Aboriginal art' books avoid the overtly political content of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art; preferring to decontextualise it as an isolated phenomena—immersed in its own unintelligible mystique. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists share this history, they make history. We

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[537] Perkins, 'Introduction', p. 4.
[538] Perkins, 'Introduction', pp. 6–7.
[539] Perkins, 'Introduction', p. 21.

are cultural activists and we state our cultural beliefs and position as indivisible from our political beliefs and position—always have, always will.[540]

The catalogue essay is illustrated with sensationalist newspaper headlines, stereotypical caricatures of Aboriginal people, and some more progressive cultural objects including the lyrics to singer Paul Kelly's protest anthem *From Little Things Big Things Grow* (1991). Following the essay, the history of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags is provided. The catalogue finishes with a powerful statement by artist Richard Bell that ends: 'the white man's flag is seen for what it is – a piece of rag symbolising dispossession and oppression of our people. FUCK THE BRITISH FLAG (and its derivatives).'[541] This is the most antagonistic curatorial gesture that I found in all my archival research. Both artistic and curatorial provocation echo Jean Paul Sartre's description of the anger of the oppressed in the preface to Franz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). While a fuller analysis would be necessary, it also seems possible to identify here the significance of agonism and political conflict, most notably theorised by Chantal Mouffe.[542]

True Colours as an object of research and my extrapolation of its provocations in terms of the discourses on anger, violence, oppression and agonism appear to be a world away from the pursuit of an ethical trajectory in the field of curating that is largely centred on the concept of care. The two frameworks seem at odds with one another, and in many ways this holds true. However in a most extraordinary turn of events, between 1994 and 1997 Brenda Croft and Hetti Perkins went from curating *True Colours* which directly confronted the myths and 'little white lies' of Australian national identity, to representing Australia at its national pavilion at (arguably) the heart of the mainstream international art world, almost literally standing under the Australian flag. Somehow, devising and executing *True Colours,* and producing its astonishingly confrontational statements did not preclude Croft and Perkins from co-curating *fluent.* Nor is it insignificant or temporally distant enough for the Australia Council, at the point of inviting applications for the Australian Pavilion in 1995, to overlook. Rather, it must be the case that *True Colours* prepared Croft and Perkins for *fluent*, giving the pair the practical experience of curating an international exhibition, expanding their skill set, developing their talents and so on. Furthermore, in terms of organising knowledge, *True Colours* was perhaps seen as a significant moment in the development of Perkins and Croft's finely-tuned awareness of what it means to produce and shape knowledge, and introduce a certain politics into visibility. As an instance of experimental practice, it perhaps tested how statements can be made legible in the public domain. The statements of *True Colours* perhaps needed to be made, to destabilise the dominant order of representation, to clear a space in order for the more subtle explorations and analysis of *fluent* to become possible. This is more likely where the real contradiction lies, not only at the level of the discursive statements, but in the conditions that make both exhibitions possible and necessitate their intervention. According to Hetti Perkins, in 1996 at a

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[540] Brenda L Croft and Hetti Perkins, 'Truths, Myths and Little White Lies', in *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag* (Sydney: Boomalli Artists Cooperative, 1994).

[541] Croft and Perkins.

[542] See for example Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2013).

symposium in New Delhi as part of the Australian trade and culture promotion 'New Horizons,' 'India's foremost art critic, Geeta Kapur, commented on the complete irony of a nation representing itself with a people so recently undisenfranchised.'[543] Perkins added, 'It is also deeply hypocritical that a country promoting itself with the art of a people inherently connected to the land should be simultaneously considering legislation to wipe out the last vestiges of official recognition of this connection.'[544]

Perkins began work at AGNSW in 1990 and worked there for over a decade as Curator of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Art. Once Perkins moved from Boomalli into her permanent position, there was a clear change in cadre of the exhibitions she was producing with Croft and others. This is not to undermine the political effectiveness and even Aboriginality of Perkins' curatorial work, which would be to re-establish a narrative of corruption or dilution of Aboriginal production as it moves into 'mainstream' spaces. Instead moving into larger institutions would have changed the configurations of power and knowledge, preventing and enabling different kinds of discursive statements. Also there was perhaps a shift in what forms of representation and intervention were considered urgent and more effective as the times changed.

Following *fluent,* Perkins curated major exhibitions at AGNSW including *Papunya Tula: Genesis and Genius* for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Arts Festival; *Crossing Country: The Alchemy of West Arnhem Land Art* (2004); and *Half Lights: Portraits from Black Australia* (2008). She also developed the collection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art which represents a range of practices. Perkins resigned on principle in 2012, citing a lack of institutional responsiveness to the promised development of the Yiribana Gallery where the collection is displayed.[545] She was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald* to have observed that the 'mainstreaming' of Indigenous culture 'had failed', adding, 'there are too few opportunities for our people to work in the big galleries and museums and those that do seem stuck in always being the bridesmaid, never the bride.'[546] Outside of the gallery, Perkins and Croft co-curated the Australian Indigenous Art Commission for the new Musee du Quai Branly in 2006, which included the work of Judy Watson.

In 2010 *art+soul,* a television series for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation was organised and presented by Perkins, which travelled around Australia to Aboriginal artistic communities.[547] Perkins was a curatorial advisor to Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev for *dOCUMENTA* 13 in 2012, which included work by Emily Kame Kngwarreye. Perkins is now Chair of the Indigenous Advisory Group at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and resident curator at Bangarra Dance Theatre, both in Sydney.

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[543] Hannah Fink and Hetti Perkins, 'Writing for Land', *Art & Australia*, 35 (1997), 60–63 (p. 61).

[544] Fink and Perkins, p. 61.

[545] Joyce Morgan, 'Letter Reveals Frustration That Forced Perkins to Quit Gallery', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 26 September 2012) <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/letter-reveals-frustration-that-forced-perkins-to-quit-gallery-20110925-1krtp.html>.

[546] Morgan.

[547] See more at http://www.abc.net.au/arts/artandsoul/about/default.htm

She has recently initiated a dialogue in the public domain on the idea of a national institution, or centre, of Indigenous art, which is maybe the logical extension of the unfulfilled vision she had for AGNSW.[548] Perkins is also currently Creative Director of Corroboree Sydney (14-24 November, 2013), Australia's newest annual Indigenous festival.

I shall now turn to *fluent*'s other co-curator, Victoria Lynn, a prolific white Australian curator who was born in 1963. Her father was Elwyn Lynn, the well-known art critic, writer, curator and artist, whose own views on Aboriginal art underwent a major paradigm shift in his lifetime, as I explore in Chapter Six. Victoria Lynn's exposure to art from a young age sowed the seeds for her curatorial career. She was appointed Assistant Curator of Contemporary Art at AGNSW in 1987, and co-curated the major recurring Australian contemporary art exhibition *Australian Perspecta* with Tony Bond in 1989. From 1991 Lynn was Curator of Contemporary Art at AGNSW, after which time she was lead curator of *Australian Perspecta* 1991 and 1993. An early collaboration with Perkins was a catalogue essay for *Australian Perspecta* (1993) titled 'Blak artists, cultural activists', before Perkins joined AGNSW. For some, this exhibition was a forerunner to *fluent* in its challenge to fixity.[549] In her catalogue introduction, Lynn wrote:

> Today there is a perceivable shift in the attitudes of many emerging Australian artists to the appropriation art of the 1980s and the consequent rejection of modernity. Further their 'world view' is altering as the binarism of centre/periphery models continue to slowly break down.

> We presently find ourselves in the midst of a new rhetoric of 'open borders', 'shifting traditions', and 'cultural hybridity.' Although such catch phrases within a new cultural politics of difference may function in the same totalising sense of 'anything goes', postcolonialist criticism does at least allow us to consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art, for example, in relation to other contemporary forms of expression, challenging our assessment of contemporary art in the past and in the present. It is in the light of these changes, rather than on the basis of a single theme, that Perspecta 1993 has been conceived.[550]

While at AGNSW, according to one online profile, Lynn 'curated or co-curated numerous exhibitions covering a wide range of art practices from painting to video, film and new media.'[551] Lynn stepped down from the role in 2001. In this year she took up the position of Chair, Visual Arts/Craft Board of the Australia Council, stepping down in 2004. She began a freelance curatorial career in which she would curate several major exhibitions in Australia and oversees. In 2003 she was Commissioner of the Australian Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale for the exhibition of work by Patricia Piccinini, curated by Linda Michael, the only time since *fluent* that a woman curator would exhibit work by one or more women artists without men, with the exception of the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013 when Catherine de Zegher curated the work of Simryn Gill (although a mix of men

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[548] 'A Place of Our Own: A Conversation between Heti Perkins and Daniel Browning', *Artlink*, 32 (2012), 46–48.

[549] Sally Butler, 'Emily Kngwarreye and the Enigmatic Object of Discourse' (The University of Queensland, 2002), p. 113 <http://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:106210> [accessed 8 November 2012].

[550] Victoria Lynn, 'Curator's Introduction', in *Australian Perspecta* (Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1993), p. iii.

[551] Andrew Frost, 'Victoria Lynn', *Scanlines: Video Art in Australia Since the 1960s*, 2013 <http://scanlines.net/person/victoria-lynn>.

and women have been curating/exhibiting work together since 1999). Lynn joined the Australian Centre for the Moving Image as Director for three years in Melbourne, and took up a Churchill Fellowship in 2008, travelling to 'the Netherlands, Spain, Germany and the UK to explore ways in which "to integrate media-based work into exhibitions or events that include other kind of work." The Dutch experimental practice at a curatorial level is what most fascinated her.'[552] In this year, Lynn also contributed an important essay to the Art & Australia publication *Current,* in which Perkins and Croft also contributed to a roundtable discussion on contemporary art. The themes Lynn used to structure her essay I would argue have resonance with Indigeneity as explored in *fluent*, for instance convergence, proximity, multiplicity and transgression. Lynn was the visual arts curator for the Adelaide Festival in 2010 and 2012, where she established and curated the Adelaide International: *Apart, we are together* (2010) and the Adelaide International: *Restless* (2012), which included work by Postcommodity, an Indigenous artistic collective from the USA whose 'work functions as a shared Indigenous lens and voice to engage and respond to the contemporary realities of globalism and neoliberalism.'[553] Her time in Adelaide also overlapped with Croft's appointment at the University of South Australia. Lynn's position since 2012 has been Director of the TarraWarra Museum of Art in Victoria, where she curated the TarraWarra Biennial 2012: *Sonic Spheres*. According to one article on Lynn, in *Sonic Spheres* the landscape and the sonic are bound together in interpretations of a Tingari song cycle by several Pintupi artists from Kiwirrkura: 'The accompanying catalogue, written by Lynn, contains a commentary by Hetti Perkins on the indivisible link between song, tradition and Dreaming.'[554] The same article comments that a defining approach of Lynn's 'is to always start with the artist because they are paramount to the curator's ideas,' which resonates with a relational concept of ethical responsibility to artist and work. In the same article, Lynn explained 'I am inspired by the long term passion and commitment of many women artists over several decades of their careers... artists who continue to refine and build on their practice.'[555]

The professional collaborations and conversations between the co-curators coincide with friendships, and possibly expanded Aboriginal definitions of family. While there is some evidence in the public domain of these connections, exemplified above, relations are easier to recognise with the rise of social media. These relations are made equally problematic for research as there are undocumented ethical issues. For the formalised purposes of the research ethics process, the remit of my doctoral research is 'professional not personal.' A social history project in the future might map these overlapping connections in an attempt to enrich the archive and bring to light the significance of deep intellectual but also emotional and other dimensions for cultural production. These are not

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[552] Tali Lavi, 'Victoria Lynn', *The Melbourne Review*, 2012
    <http://www.melbournereview.com.au/features/article/victoria-lynn> [accessed 23 November 2013].
[553] 'RESTLESS Adelaide International 2012 at Flinders University City Gallery (State Library of South
    Australia), Adelaide, SA on 2 Mar 12', *Liveguide*
    <http://www.liveguide.com.au/Events/725606/RESTLESS_Adelaide_International_2012/RESTLESS_Ad
    elaide_International_2012> [accessed 23 November 2013].
[554] Lavi.
[555] Lavi.

necessarily my stories to tell, however they would extend the current recognition that curatorial practices are increasingly socially contingent.

fluent, 47th Venice Biennale 1997. A descriptive analysis

fluent ran from 5 June—9 November 1997 in the Australian Pavilion and then toured nationally. It featured the work of three contemporary Aboriginal women artists; the late Emily Kame Kngwarreye (Anmatyerre people), Judy Watson (Waanyi people) and Yvonne Koolmatrie (Ngarrindjeri people).

Figure 18. Cover (detail) of *fluent* catalogue, 1997. Courtesy AGNSW.

The exhibition title and concept

The exhibition's title, *fluent,* signifies a range of meanings. It comes from the Latin verb *fluere* meaning 'to flow'. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, fluent may mean 'of things compared to a stream or to the tide, or having the property or capacity of flowing easily'; 'ready to flow'; 'fluid, liquid'. It has a specific relation to painting in the sense of 'producing a fluid or liquid effect'. In terms of movement, fluent means 'moving easily or gracefully'; 'not stiff or rigid'. In terms of speech and style, it means 'flowing easily and readily from the tongue or pen', and finally describes a natural body of liquid itself: 'a stream, a current of water'.[556]

Hetti Perkins introduces the exhibition's concept in the catalogue:

fluent acknowledges the artists' fluidity of expression and fluency of method; asserting a contemporary vision within an Indigenous specificity. The motif of the stripe (as it appears in Kngwarreye's work) visually articulates the concept of fluency. The stripe is mobile; moving forward and backward, up and down, spontaneous, forceful and gestural. It is a mark that is globally occurring, like a word in a language we can all understand.[557]

Fluency is first affiliated with fluidity and the non-fixity of artistic expression and method, and immediately established as contemporary located within an Indigenous specificity. This at once enables a dynamic but grounded view of Indigenous art that starts with artistic making, method and materiality itself as already moving and irreducible, refuting the possibility of oppositional thinking which has underpinned and facilitated the polarisation of Indigeneity, constructed as timeless and

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[556] 'Fluent, Adj. and N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/72067> [accessed 1 November 2013].

[557] I explore the catalogue as a text and archival resource further towards the end of the chapter.
Hetti Perkins, 'Fluent', in *Fluent: Australia Pavilion* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 1997), pp. 9–19 (p. 9).

marked by difference, against contemporaneity, as the now, the new, the measure of culture. *fluent* in this first line is invoked to performatively enact its own dictionary definition as *fluid or liquid, not stiff or rigid* with a fuller cultural, discursive and political elaboration. The curator suggests that the motif of the stripe in paintings by artist Emily Kame Kngwarreye visualises fluency in its dual direction, rather than a single way or infinite ways; movement and strength rather than stillness, stasis, fragility and tenuousness; spontaneity and force, rather than studious calculation, passivity or weakness; and lastly ensuing from a gesture, which conveys 'a movement expressive of thought or feeling.'[558] This emphasises physicality and the artist's mark as entwined with affect, emotion, and the cerebral, subjectivity, cultural and political positioning, rather than the purely cognitive or decorative. Already in this brief explanation, a number of responsibilities emerge to ideas about Indigenous and contemporary art and culture, and the way it is understood. Also relationality surfaces as a key theme.

Perkins' statement that the idea that the mark is 'like a word in a language we can all understand' offers a 'way in' to looking at Aboriginal art as contemporary art, with international currency, rather than as a cipher of a completely unknown culture (or cultures), and therefore baffling or dismissible, without traction. One of the major struggles of the early to mid 1990s was for Aboriginal art to be recognised institutionally as contemporary art. Prior to *fluent,* there had been many instances of Aboriginal artists and curators encountering the view that it was not contemporary art, which was effectively a barrier to participation in the field of visual art. In an article reflecting on *fluent,* Croft wrote in 1998 that the curators, 'attempted to anticipate... a possible dismissal of *fluent* as being "folk" art, and therefore, not contemporary.'[559] One recent historical precedent was the case of Gabrielle Pizzi, Director of the Melbourne commercial gallery Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, and the 1995 Cologne Art Fair. Pizzi encountered opposition from the fair's organisers, 'who initially refused to approve her inclusion due to her exhibiting the work of contemporary indigenous artists from Australia on such grounds. Pizzi successfully challenged the decision and was readmitted.'[560] Curator Djon Mundine also reported on the same event in 1997: 'Happily, the organisers of Art Cologne have since readmitted the gallery, saying that they did not want to appear to be biased (racist).'[561]

This threatened dismissal, although it never came through (and due to a change of perspective at that), evidences the unstable reality for artists and curators producing and caring for Aboriginal contemporary art at the time. *fluent* was on the cusp of change. From the outset, the exhibition was therefore envisaged by the curators as 'an opportunity to present a select number of Australia's

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[558] 'Gesture, N.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/77985> [accessed 1 November 2013].

[559] Brenda L Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', *Periphery*, 1998, 9–13 (p. 12).

[560] Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', p. 13.

[561] Djon Mundine, 'Aboriginal Art Abroad: Responses to Touring Exhibitions in Europe, the United States and Asia', *Art & Australia*, 35 (1997), 68–73 (p. 72).

leading contemporary indigenous artists to an audience within an international contemporary art context.'[562] The curatorial act of positioning contemporary Aboriginal art within the international contemporary art context is far from self-evident however, so I explore this in more depth below and in the next chapter.

Time

By foregrounding contemporaneity and Indigeneity, the curators raised the question of time in a cross-cultural context. At the start of her introduction, Perkins looks to the artist Kngwarreye, who 'creates highly individual and energetic interpretations of an ancient tradition, continuously reinventing her treatment of a constant subject.'[563] Tradition for Kngwarreye and the other artists is therefore is not so much a fixed structure or narrative from the long-ago past pulled into the present, but a constant source of vitality. As Perkins states,

> Literal interpretations of [Kngwarreye's] works describe an idiosyncratic and microcosmic view of the desert floor, grass seeds and flowers overlaying the organic subterranean networks that lie below the surface of the land. Analogies may be made to the dreaming tracks which traverse Australia, emanating from and linking the hundreds of Aboriginal communities around the country, like fluid rivers of spiritual power that sustain and nurture Aboriginal people and the land.[564]

Perkins notes that 'dreaming tracks' is a 'general expression used to describe the cultural connections between Aboriginal groups, revealed through the performing and visual arts. Often these tracks refer to the travels of ancestor beings.'[565]

For tens of thousands of years prior to the British invasion and beyond, the traditional Aboriginal concept of time has not been linear and chronological but multidimensional, similar to 'a pond which you can swim through, up, down and around.'[566]

> In most stories of the Dreaming, the Ancestor Spirits came to the earth in human form and as they moved through the land, they created the animals, plants, rocks and other forms of the land that we know today. They also created the relationships between groups and individuals to the land, the animals and other people.

> Once the ancestor spirits had created the world, they changed into trees, the stars, rocks, watering holes or other objects. These are the sacred places of Aboriginal culture and have special properties. Because the ancestors did not disappear at the end of the Dreaming, but remained in these sacred sites, the Dreaming is never-ending, linking the past and the present, the people and the land.[567]

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562 Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', p. 9.

563 Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.

564 Perkins, 'Fluent', pp. 14–15.

565 Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 20.

566 Aleksandar Janca and Clothilde Bullen, 'The Aboriginal Concept of Time and Its Mental Health Implications', *Australasian Psychiatry*, 11 (2003), 40–44 (p. 41).

567 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 'The Dreaming' <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/dreaming> [accessed 27 November 2012].

The Dreaming did not occur in the distant past but is 'never-ending', not entirely assimilable into the Western/white Australian temporal order. In fact the continuation, survival and adaption of the Aboriginal conception of time can be seen as resistance against the domination of linear time, which is a political act as well as a philosophical difference.[568] Likewise another approach to time in *fluent* is the evocation of the recent colonial past and its histories of violence, oppression and exploitation. Artist Judy Watson's work is said by the curators to 'use the principles of western abstraction to expose the hidden histories of the colonial expansionist era, scattering her surfaces with the mementos of past presences.'[569] This evidences a curatorial approach to the artwork that does not dismiss or relegate events and struggles to the past, as a sad and unfortunate back-history, but as something present and inscribed in the 'current'. It is highly significant, therefore, that Perkins describes *fluent* as focussed on 'the artists' fluidity of expression and fluency of method; asserting a contemporary vision within an Indigenous specificity.' The curatorial remit of *fluent* presents Indigenous art as contemporary, not to the exclusion of the past, but as related to it.

There may be an affinity between *fluent* and *Inside the Visible,* in relation to Julia Kristeva's distinction between the chronological and linear time of political history, and cyclical, monumental time on the other, with a third, dialectical resolution in the form of 'generation' as a signifying space.[570] It is not clear whether the Indigenous conception of Dreamings and never-ending time aligns with Kristeva's view of monumental, cyclical time as related to essentialism. I would be careful not to impose Kristeva's schema because this may repress Indigenous cultural specificity. There is, however, a commonality in the sense that *fluent* offers to imbue contemporaneity with Indigenous meanings, reconceptualising linear time but without negating the importance and continued significance, and presence, of the implications of colonialist expansion and attempted destruction, which might be seen as occurring in the time of politics and history, in Kristeva's sense.

Coincidentally, the exhibition catalogue covers for *fluent* and *Inside the Visible* use very similar typewriter fonts, which suggest that ink has been freshly applied and hence suggest contemporary as in 'just now' (Figure 18). At the same time there is a reference to history, as the typewriter is a modern invention; mechanical rather than digital. The typewriter font therefore suggests the physical trace or imprint of an earlier moment, and even lapsed subjectivity to recall graphic designer Luc Derycke's comment on *Inside the Visible*'s font *Trixie.*

With regards to exhibition titles, *fluent* also resonates with *Inside the Visible* and the move beyond oppositions and fixed categories, statements and contexts. Some of Croft's other exhibition titles resonate with the poetic concept suggested by de Zegher's exhibition title *Inside the Visible.*

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[568] See for example Mike Donaldson, 'The End of Time? Aboriginal Temporality and the British Invasion of Australia', *Time and Society*, 5 (1996), 187–207.

[569] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.

[570] Kristeva.

Croft's exhibition *Beyond the Pale* (2000) situated the historical marginalisation of Indigenous artforms within a wider analysis of power, invisibility and knowledge. Croft wrote in the catalogue,

> Beyond the pale. Outside the boundaries. On the outskirts. At the edge. Out of sight, out of mind. Peripheral. Fenced off. Marginal. Beyond the line of sight. Over the horizon. Elsewhere. The original, literal meaning of 'beyond the pale' has its roots in old Ireland, and the reference is to those who lived outside the area controlled by a fence made of pales. Being 'beyond the pale' is the experience of Indigenous people/people of colour and others labelled outcasts—the refuse of 'civilised society'—who have experienced discrimination, and in many cases, genocide throughout the ages.[571]

Similarly the title of the exhibition *Stop(the)Gap* (2011) resonates. It is said to

> [R]eflect on the role of vernacular such as 'stop the gap / mind the gap / close the gap' and its specific reference to contemporaneous Indigenous culture and politics; part of the general lexicon, the phrase is wielded about as political rhetoric and commonly misconstrued,' for example in the Northern Territory Intervention.[572]

Place

The red of *fluent'*s catalogue cover references the Aboriginal flag, which was designed by Arrente artist Harold Thomas in 1971. The final statement in the catalogue explains,

> The Aboriginal flag is a symbol of unity, strength and pride for Aboriginal people. In the three colours of the flag, black symbolises our people—past, present and future; yellow represents the sun, the giver of life, and red represents the earth, red ochre and our spiritual relationship to the land.[573]

The red cover therefore carries strong cultural meaning which resonates in a spiritual and political way with land. It is difficult to convey the strength of feeling over land in Australia, and the impact of the colour red in the context of the flag which represents a prior (pre-colonial) and ongoing relationship with land (or, for Aboriginal peoples, Country, with a capital C, for a specific place which signifies a plurality of connections).[574] This is the same land on which white Australia has been built and continues to derive financial and symbolic, nationalistic sustenance, along with other cultural groups who have come to call it 'home.' To evidence this association, Perkins concludes the curatorial essay with the statement, 'We belong to this country; always have, always will.'[575] Perkins here adapts the slogan 'Always has been, always will be Aboriginal land,' which is used widely by Aboriginal activists, for example the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC) reported that on Invasion/Australia Day, 2012, '[m]ore than 200 activists from the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra have marched on Parliament House, chanting outside the front doors "always was, always

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[571] Brenda L Croft, 'Beyond the Pale: Empires Built on the Bones of the Dispossessed', in *Beyond the Pale* (Adelaide: Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, 2000), pp. 8–14 (p. 10).

[572] Brenda L Croft, 'Sell-Abrasion of Our Nations', in *Stop(the)Gap: International Indigenous art in motion* (Adelaide: Anne and Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, 2011).

[573] Perkins, 'Fluent'.

[574] 'Relationships to Country: Aboriginal People and Torres Strait Islander People' (Queensland Studies Authority, 2008) <http://www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/approach/indigenous_res005_0803.pdf>.

[575] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 19.

will be Aboriginal land".'[576] Without conflating these practices, their commonality is a call for the recognition of the *Aboriginality* of the land in Australia, and the continuation of this being the case. The slogan is an act, because it resists 'white-wash', where the Aboriginal claim to land is made invisible. Otherwise Aboriginal specificity is lost.

Nationalism, or rather counter-nationalism, and identity politics are not typically based in fluidity and fluency, as Gayatri Spivak illustrates in her chapter *Planetarity* in *Death of a Discipline*. She quotes Derrida's 1996 statement '[w]hat is identity, this concept of which the transparent identity to itself is always dogmatically presupposed by so many debates on monoculturalism or multiculturalism, nationality, citizenship, and belonging, in general?'[577] This critical position problematising identity politics and its essentialising implications is one of several that were emerging in the 1980s and early 1990s internationally.[578] The apparent discrepancy of *fluent* is that it could be read as a post-structural assertion of hybridity and fluid identities, and yet it maintains a strong stance on Aboriginal identity and land. The Australian art historian Sally Butler suggested in her doctoral thesis on Emily Kame Kngwarreye that '*fluent* carries through the "shifting borders" theme that by [1997] characterises curatorial approaches to Aboriginal art.'[579] She argued that the exhibition therefore was 'perhaps too subtle... a concept of "fluidity"... [collapses] boundaries of difference to the extent that transgressions of various categories, codes, and identities create a "wobbly" cultural nexus. Cultures are represented as expanded and unstable rather than simply "different."'[580] I would respond that the curators of *fluent* were concerned with transcending an essentialist conception of difference as authenticity, which is underpinned by oppositional logic (authentic/inauthentic), but still invested in difference as a determinant of specificity—of artistic methods, cultural location, seniority and so on. Fluency and fluidity as themes do not signify infinite relativism, nor a paradox or contradiction, but ways of describing and conceptualising the connections between grounded practices. Even if these practices (can) produce or be read for statements and politics that unite them in a generalisable position to counter invisibility, they are still not undifferentiated and unstable.[581]

By using red and evoking the Aboriginal flag on the exhibition catalogue cover, the curators positioned fluency and fluidity primarily in relation to land, as opposed to water as one might expect. Fluency and fluidity are suggested to resonate with Venice as a city of water, which I shall explain below in more detail, however the initial cultural reference point is land. To illustrate this point, the

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[576] Emma Griffiths, 'Tent Embassy Protesters March on Parliament', *ABC News*, 2012 <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-01-27/protesters-march-on-parliament-house/3796988> [accessed 27 January 2012].

[577] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Death of a Discipline* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

[578] One major voice was Judith Butler, see Judith P. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, Thinking Gender (New York ; London: Routledge, 1990).

[579] Sally Butler, 'Emily Kngwarreye and the Enigmatic Object of Discourse', p. 109.

[580] Sally Butler, 'Emily Kngwarreye and the Enigmatic Object of Discourse', p. 109.

[581] I return to responses to *fluent* at the end of the chapter.

participating artist Judy Watson is quoted prominently in the exhibition catalogue, press release and brochures with a poignant statement:

> I listen and hear those words a hundred years away
>
> That is my Grandmother's Mother's Country
>
> it seeps down through blood and memory and soaks into the ground.[582]

Here it is not blood seeping and soaking, but Country. Perkins framed this statement in the catalogue by explaining:

> Many Aboriginal people living in the more evidently colonised zones of Australia have experienced a form of ethnocide that has attempted to dispossess us of our history, our culture and even our identity.[583]

But the connection to Country survives. In addition to Aboriginal specificity, the colour red may also have significance for all people. Thinking about the affects of the colour red, the theorist Brian Massumi has written:

> The colour red always bleeds. It summons up an unusually wide ranging—but often open, ambiguous—power to affect and be affected. Even in images, red bleeds into our real life, our real blood flows. Red bleeds and blood flows involve a literal affective contagion. It's a bleed in which "body meets image."[584]

For whom the 'colour red bleeds' is not specified by Massumi. His point is that there are things happening on other levels that are not immediately apparent, in ways that are not semiotic like Barthes' connotative meanings. I picked up on Massumi's comment in a completely different publication, *The Affect Theory Reader* (2010), because I am trying to think through the exhibition as more than a statement, but as an affective space. The catalogue cover and the exhibition are not artworks, but nevertheless they resonate aesthetically, which may owe something to Croft's being an artist as well as a curator.

Exhibition structure, artists and artworks

As a group exhibition, *fluent* was structured so that all three artworks occupied more or less equal positions in order to suggest fluidity between them. There were no hierarchies ranking the artist according to gender or geographical location, nor of the artworks according to media or material. There were no thematic sections or chronological ordering; the emphasis was on the works' shared commonalities.

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[582] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 12.

[583] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 12.

[584] Lone Bertelsen and Andrew Murphie, 'An Ethics of Everyday Infinities and Powers: Felix Guattari on Affect and the Refrain', in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. by Melissa Gregg and Gregory J Seigworth (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 138–57 (p. 138).

The Australian Pavilion, designed by architect Philip Cox and first opened in 1988, was split level.[585] Judy Watson's works are said to have been installed in the downstairs space, and Kngwarreye and Koolmatrie's works were installed on the top level.[586] In the catalogue essay Perkins does not divide her treatment of each artist into sections headed by the artists' names, but weaves interconnections between the three throughout the essay. My choice to divide the following discussion into three sections on each of the artists reflects the need to outline their participation as different practitioners from different socio-cultural locations.

Emily Kame Kngwarreye

In the catalogue, it is suggested that Emily Kame Kngwarreye's paintings 'visually articulate the concept of fluency and fluidity.'[587] In this sense they are highly significant for the premise of the exhibition because they visualise the curatorial concept, and offer a way of understanding the other works as well. Croft has also said that Kngwarreye was selected 'because [she was] simply the most significant Aboriginal artist of the time.' [588] This does not necessarily indicate a superficial rationale for the artist's selection, but a strategic move highlighting the innovation, achievement and success of Aboriginal artists in the light of the exhibition's claim to contemporaneity.

In fact, the difficulty in writing about Kngwarreye is that the magnitude of the discourse on the artist, her work and her reputation for being one of Australia's greatest and highest-selling artists.[589] Throughout my research, a significant dilemma has been how best to represent Kngwarreye, given that the terms and concepts available to understand her work have transformed over time.

I have frequently felt overwhelmed in my research on Kngwarreye, however two learning experiences helped me orient my writing. The first was reading art historian and curator Sally Butler's doctoral thesis, titled *Emily Kngwarreye and the Enigmatic Object of Discourse* (2002). Although it remains unpublished, it is an important intervention because it establishes how 'Emily Kame Kngwarreye' the star artist has come to be constructed in discourse. The second learning experience was in fact born of a teaching experience, when I re-designed and taught one session on the Masters in Art Gallery and Museum Studies module *Interpreting Cultures* at Leeds University in November, 2012. As my brief was to co-ordinate a seminar on postcolonialism and the museum/gallery, I designed a case study around Emily Kame Kngwarreye, and assigned for primary reading material the text on the website for the 2008 exhibition *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* curated by

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[585]It is currently being replaced. See 'Venice Biennale', *Venice Biennale* <http://venicebiennale.australiacouncil.gov.au> [accessed 5 November 2012].

[586] Gwen Horsfield, 'New Directions' (presented at the Emily Symposium, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, 2008).

[587] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 9. Unfortunately I cannot reproduce the images due to Indigenous intellectual and cultural property protocol, however I describe the paintings selected further on in this section.

[588] Croft interview

[589] 'Tell "Em They're Dreaming', *The Sydney Morning Herald* <http://www.smh.com.au/money/investing/tell-em-theyre-dreaming-20130514-2jitv.html> [accessed 23 November 2013].

Margo Neale at the National Museum of Australia. Disentangling the complex philosophical and political issues about contemporary Aboriginality and representation in this exhibition with the Masters students prompted me to acknowledge the time involved in explicating the dense and contested histories embedded in this single exhibition, one of many discursive sites to question the representation, position and status of Kngwarreye within her community, the Australian and global art world. I realised the only way of writing about Kngwarreye in this chapter would be by staying extremely close to *fluent,* and critically examining the ways the curators represented her in 1997, and relating this to the representations of the artist prior to 1997. The fact that my own position is inflected by discursive developments since 1997 is not irrelevant, but I try to let it shape my critical distance, rather than shift the focus off the socio-historical moment of *fluent.*

The curators of *fluent* explain that Kngwarreye was a senior Anmatyerre law woman in her community at Atnltyeye, Utopia, Central Australia.[590] She was born around 1910. She first saw a white person as a girl,

> …[S]everal years before Europeans arrived in the area. She has told Anne Brody, curator of the Holmes a Court Collection, [... that she] and a friend were digging for yams when they saw a man on horseback - the first horse they had seen, too - and thought it was the devil, come to kill them. An Aboriginal man wearing an iron collar and chains was riding a second horse, tied to the first. Brody, who is writing a book about the artist, surmises that the white man was a police officer.[591]

This actual memory of 'first contact' with white culture could be said to mark the beginning of the modernisation of Kngwarreye's world, although Europeans had invaded the wider country long before. This event's significance is that it illustrates the rapid social, cultural, economic and political change that would happen in Kngwarreye's lifetime.

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[590] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 14.

[591] Jane Cadzow, 'The Emily Industry', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 3 August 1995).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 19. Installation shot of *fluent,* in the Australian Pavilion, 47th Venice Biennale, 1997. Courtesy AGNSW. Artwork (centre) *Untitled (Awelye)* by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, 1994. Synthetic polymer paint on polyester. Private collection.

The paintings by Kngwarreye selected for *fluent* were part of her *Untitled (Awelye)* series made a few years before her death in 1996. A purely formal description of Kngwarreye's work does not even begin to account for the meanings they contain and convey. The stripe motif, however is the means by which Kngwarreye's work is introduced by Perkins, and indeed she consistently returns to visual descriptions throughout her explication of Kngwarreye's practice. Thus I can say that the *Untitled* series comprises several synthetic polymer paintings on polyester that feature strong horizontal and vertical lines, in many shades of brown, black and blue, roughly applied but regular. They look as though applied quickly. Similar observations, characteristic of a non-Aboriginal art historian new to Aboriginal art, who cannot access the deeper possibilities due to lack of knowledge, have been the basis of comparisons made between Kngwarreye and 'Abstract Expressionists' or mid-Century 'Modernists' by prominent white Australian art historians since the early 1990s at least. For instance in 1995 the Sydney Morning Herald reported that art historian (and later author of *Thinking Contemporary Curating*) Terry Smith suggested that 'it is possible to see in her paintings "a kind of a magical reappearance of Matisse. Her sense of colour is very Matissean."'[592] The journalist continued to frame Smith's commentary in terms of modernist logic:

> Fascinated by the way Kngwarreye bridges the gap between the primitive and the contemporary, Smith says: "It's quite extraordinary. If you just looked at her as an abstract painter within the traditions of European modernism, you'd have to say that she was one of the major abstract painters of the 20th century."[593]

I would argue that *fluent* was specifically designed to respond to (perhaps) sensationalist alignments like these. *fluent's* curators seem to reclaim the Aboriginal specificity of Kngwarreye's work by giving an insight into the stories and knowledge they actually represent; indeed the paintings

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[592] Cadzow.
[593] Cadzow.

do not only represent Dreaming stories, but are in fact made possible by them and do work to keep them alive. Keeping the Dreaming alive

> …[T]akes the forms of painting, song, dancing or ceremony - all of which are therefore necessarily inextricably linked. This is part of a living tradition based on ritual practices. Traditions and practices also merge with economic and ecological responsibilities for 'looking after country'. Looking after country means to continue to express these ritual forms of the Dreaming.[594]

'Traditions and practices' may be thought of as cultural responsibilities, which are said to merge with economic and ecological responsibilities in Kngwarreye's practice. Extending well beyond solely formal comparisons, the framing of the artist's work and its scope is established as 'looking after country,' which may be read as a form of care. Like the reading I offered of *Inside the Visible* in Chapter Four, it may be possible to see a futurity to the caring acts of looking after Country because they look forwards, not necessarily only in a linear sense. In the way that the exhibition *fluent* makes the artist's cultural, ecological and economic responsibilities clear, the curators take on an educational or pedagogical role or responsibility, to represent their own cultural priorities against views exemplified by Smith at the time.

To look forward to 2008, and the exhibition *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, the mainstream art world discourse had by then shifted again to reclaim the validity of formal comparisons between Kngwarreye and Western abstraction on the basis that there are actually some productive affinities, in relation to artistic innovation and experimental materiality. As Indigenous curator Margo Neale stated eleven years after *fluent*,

> We [curators] try to resolve the persistent need to reconcile the abstract canvases produced by an elderly black woman from the desert with the Western conception of modernism. Allied to this is the critical issue of how to pluck a single Indigenous artist from a community collective environment and present her work using a European model of the monograph in white spaces— a tradition that is alien to the lineage of the artist whose work is being represented. We are also concerned with how to acknowledge the cultural traditions that inform Emily's [sic] paintings— the living environment that they were produced in, the work practices she employed and the artist's community at Utopia of which she was an integral part, yet how can we produce a successful show of great contemporary Australian art that is not marginalised through cultural difference? We need to create an environment where the paintings function simultaneously as cultural narratives without becoming objects of anthropological scrutiny, and as works of modernist abstract art without being sanitised of their cultural content.[595]

While *fluent* in 1997 made no reference to Western abstraction with regards to Kngwarreye's work, it did not paranoically denounce possible comparisons explicitly.[596] Instead it read the work

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[594] Cabinet.

[595] Margo Neale, 'Introduction', in *Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2008), p. 13.

[596] I use 'paranoic' in the sense articulated by Eve Sedgwick in her analysis of methodological possibilities. She writes, the 'hermeneutics of suspicion'... may have had an unintentionally stultifying side-effect: they may have made it less rather than more possible to unpack the local, contingent relations between any given piece of knowledge and its narrative/epistemological entailments for the seeker, knower or teller.'

through a more culturally-informed mode of visual analysis and engagement with materiality, at the same time using language and concepts that aligned Kngwarreye's work with quality and status. I propose that *fluent* in 1997 may actually have predated, even enabled, the more recent discursive turn in 2008. For example, Perkins wrote in *fluent* that:

> Kngwarreye's paintings articulate the fluent relationship between country, kin and the individual—the relationship between seen and unseen worlds. Analogy is made between the stripes and the body paint of Kngwarreye's dreamings and the sorry scars of mourning rituals. When asked to explain the meaning of her works, the artist (who spoke only in her own language) repeatedly remarked with a[n] expansive gesture *awelye*—loosely translated elsewhere as "whole lot, that's whole lot... that's what I paint: whole lot." In this way, the paintings may be understood as visual manifestations of a conceptual cosmology—all of those things that are bound up in Kngwarreye's world.[597]

Perkins interwove a culturally-grounded account of Kngwarreye's practice:

> After a lifetime of traditional cultural practice, Kngwarreye was introduced to non-traditional art practices when she was in her late sixties. Initially working with batik, it was not until over a decade later that Kngwarreye found the medium she came to master, painting on canvas. In these paintings her dreamings — the *Arlatyeye* (pencil yam), *Arkerrthe* (mountain devil lizard), *Ntange* (grass seed), *Tingu* (a Dreamtime pup), *Ankerre* (emu), *Intekwe* (a favourite food of emus), *Atnwerle* (green bean), and the yam seed after which she was named—come to life.[598]

Kngwarreye only began painting within the last decade of her life. Before this she was involved in the Ernabella project at Utopia, in which women artists used *batik,* as Perkins explains. Janet McKenzie writes,

> The Ernabella project was... pivotal in the history of the women's art movement in central Australia. From 1940, women were encouraged to make *walka* (meaningful or intentional marks) with modern materials. Batik was introduced in 1971.[599]

As liquid wax and dye on cloth, batik is fluid in medium in a distinct but related way to paint on canvas/polyester. McKenzie explains,

> Great achievements were made [with *batik*] before the artists were introduced to acrylic paint on canvas in 1988-89. Each Utopia batik composition, innocent of the dictates of the market, differs from the next in its irregular fluidities of colour and design. Emily's astounding progress - she is said to have been an artist, using western materials for only eight years - owes its drama and speed to the fact that she worked in batik for the 11-year period prior to the introduction of acrylic paint.[600]

There is a degree of focus on textiles in *fluent,* recognisable across the three artists' work. This is significant as the history of Aboriginal women's place/s in post-contact Australian culture has paralleled the undervalued place of textiles. Curator Judith Ryan has written,

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Sedgwick suggests the overreliance on a critical methodology fixated on uncovering truth is 'paranoic'. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay Is about You', in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Duke University Press, 2003), pp. 123–52.

[597] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 15.

[598] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 14.

[599] Janet McKenzie, 'Aboriginal Women as Ambassadors of Art and Culture', *Studio International*, 2008 <http://www.studiointernational.com/index.php/aboriginal-women-as-ambassadors-of-art-and-culture>.

[600] McKenzie.

During the 1970s and 1980s batik was instrumental in the awakening of central desert women - the hitherto sleeping giants of the Aboriginal art world - as creators and inventors in new materials. Before this revolutionary period, the Australian community, swept up in the patriarchal obsessions of white society, generally believed that Aboriginal art and religion were within the exclusive jurisdiction of men. In much of the writings of male anthropologists, a false dichotomy was set up between what were thought to be the 'secular' or 'profane' pursuits of women as opposed to the 'sacred' rites and designs of men. Women's autonomy in ritual matters and as landowners was not recognised. It was almost as if their social and political integrity was subsumed into digging sticks and *coolamons*, their food gathering tools, paralleling the male dictum of white Australia, 'a woman's place is in the home'. Conceived of as 'breeders, feeders and follow the leaders', women were generally denied access to introduced art materials, only receiving encouragement to produce craft items of a utilitarian nature or to assist their male relatives with the decorative infilling of paintings on canvas, creative expressions that usually went unacknowledged.[601]

The curators of *fluent* showed Kngwarreye's recent paintings, explaining that she came to excel in the medium of paint, without disowning her prior work with *batik*. Her methods were cast as both successful in relation to the field of 'contemporary art' *and* as meaningful in Anmatyere ways, constantly in flux but effective and capable in both senses. To convey that Kngwarreye was a high-achieving and accomplished contemporary artist alongside other Aboriginal women contemporary artists in a group exhibition, rather than as a 'genius' in a monographic exhibition as in *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* (2008), enabled a unique and productive configuration of knowledge around the artist and her work. The choices the curators made in terms of art historical language and institutional rhetoric might be read as symptomatic of the curators' position/s at the intersection/s of responsibilities.

Judy Watson

The vastness and intensity of commentary on Kngwarreye is not paralleled in the case of *fluent*'s other two artists, Judy Watson and Yvonne Koolmatrie. While they have attracted substantial criticism and had numerous successes as professional artists, the volume of art historical material is on a different scale. Likewise there is less market hype attached to their names, although both artists earn enough to make a living as full-time artists. Both artists also speak English, and while this obviously does not make them less Aboriginal, it means the issue of translation is not as pronounced as in Kngwarreye's case, where the curator and art historical commentary is the primary voice for non-Aboriginal audiences, or rather non-Anmatyerre speakers.

Judy Watson is one of Australia's leading contemporary artists.[602] She was born in 1959 in Mundubbera, Queensland, north of Brisbane. In the *fluent* catalogue, Watson is said to have countered her 'invisibility' as an urban-based Aboriginal woman by travelling back to her grandmother's

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[601] Judith Ryan, 'Prelude to Canvas: Batik Cadenzas Wax Lyrical', in *Across the Desert: Aboriginal Batik from Central Australia* (Melbourne: National Gallery of Victoria, 2008), p. 17.

[602] Judy Watson and Louise Martin-Chew, *Judy Watson: Blood Language* (Miegunyah Press, 2010).

Waanyi country in remote north west QLD in a journey of self-discovery.[603] This is followed by the quotation mentioned above,

> I listen and hear those words a hundred years away
>
> That is my Grandmother's Mother's Country
>
> It seeps down through blood and memory and soaks into the ground.[604]

Interestingly, the Italian translation in the catalogue on the same page translates 'soaks into the ground' into '*penetra nel terreno*,' which implies more 'penetrates the ground.' This has a masculine connotation that is not available in the English word 'soak.' Following Watson's realisations about her own heritage, Perkins highlights the commonalities and differences Watson was subsequently able to recognise across cultures in her overseas residencies. Perkins writes,

> [Watson's] recent works have documented the devastation of industrial disaster in India and of nuclear testing in the Pacific. The undulating depths of the ocean, reflected in the cool blues and greens washed across the painting' surface, are adulterated by the bloodstains that soak through the canvas. Watson's unstretched canvasses are intended to float on the wall, as a legacy of the uneasy worlds they describe and in defiance of western borders.[605]

Here the connection between fluidity, fluency and water comes into focus. In Watson's work leading up to 1997, the cultural meanings of water and its fluidity are inseparable from pollution and destruction by higher powers. The works themselves are said to catch something of the ocean's watery liquidity in the way the paint is applied thinly, diluted. Likewise bloodstains are said to 'soak' through the canvas. There seems to be no possible way of reading water in Watson's work without catching a political dimension. Likewise the curators install the works in *fluent* in a way that is sensitive to their tendencies for bleeding, soaking, staining: 'floating' on the walls, without frames. The mention that this curatorial/artistic decision defies Western borders is not really explained, however I take it to mean that Watson's soakage, staining and seepage is persistent, continual, leaking around and from under imposed systems or structures. This isn't consistent with the observations of nuclear testing or industrial disaster but more related to the survival of Aboriginal cultures and understandings of water, and/or of water itself. There is a noticeable lack of explanation about the specific significance of water for Waanyi people, however Waanyi country is in dry inland western Queensland and therefore water is perhaps precious in a distinct way from other places. In Watson's work, the curatorial concepts of fluency and fluidity seem to give rise to ideas of persistence, continuity, survival, and a kind of weight that pulls and flows downwards as much as it pushes things to the surface and keeps them afloat.

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[603] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 12.
[604] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 12.
[605] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 13.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 20. Russell Page performing with Watson's work, *fluent,* Australian Pavilion, 47th Venice Biennale, 1997. Artwork *Blood Vessel,* by Judy Watson, 1997. Pigment and pastel on canvas. Artist's collection. Courtesy AGNSW and Rayma Johnson.

Since *fluent,* the major text on Watson is by writer Louise Martin-Chew, who has written a deeply engaged introduction in their co-authored 2009 book *blood language*. Martin-Chew writes that the motif of the vessel, clearly visible in the works above,

> [M]arries Aboriginal cultural objects throughout the world with the universal shape and form used since ancient times, and evokes the womb and the magical qualities of reproduction, an almost unfathomable event that also relies on and takes place in water.[606]

This raises the feminine, perhaps differently from the feminine as a psycho-sexual position explored in *Inside the Visible.* However, Watson's more recent work *Burnt Vessels* (which featured remnants of a fire as "delicate, resilient survivors of trauma") was included in the 18th Biennale of Sydney: *all our relations* (2012) in the exhibition section *In Finite Blue Planet* at AGNSW, curated by de Zegher, which explored fragility, transiency and international Indigenous knowledge about the land and water.[607] This warrants further research beyond the thesis given de Zegher's ongoing interest in the feminine. Perhaps *fluent* even charted some ideas for *In Finite Blue Planet.*

To examine water and fluidity in Watson's work in further depth in relation to relationality, Watson is also quoted by Martin-Chew:

> ... [S]omehow water forces us to go deeper than familiar adversarial positions and contemplate what we really share—this instinct to life. Water carries a symbolic and subconscious power... water in effect constantly calls us to higher notions of social integration and connection.[608]

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[606] Watson and Martin-Chew, p. 20.

[607] not Gerald McMaster although he co-directed the whole Biennale

[608] Watson and Martin-Chew, p. 24.

Although this comment was made twelve years after *fluent,* it does illuminate Watson's thinking on water and help to catch something occurring in her works in *fluent.* Perhaps Perkins or Croft had similar, less developed conversations with Watson in preparation for *fluent,* or perhaps Watson has always had these thoughts about water. Or perhaps they actually are Waanyi-specific. Or perhaps *fluent* prompted Watson to continue thinking along these lines. The historical evidence of the connection is unavailable, however Watson's conception of water asking us to contemplate what we share, beyond adversarial positions, strikes a familiar chord for relationality and care for the other. Whether it is a different concept of relationality to de Zegher's and Ettinger's is a question for further research, however for now I can definitely identify a strong affinity.

Additionally, water for Watson in *fluent* was significant because Venice is a city of water. Perkins quoted her in the catalogue:

> Venice is a real meeting of culture with Muslim and Christian influences. The water is a constant element, the city is desperately trying not to become an Atlantis and ink beneath the waves. I love Venice, and especially the floor of San Marco where the action of the water through the church has rippled and buckled the mosaics, you can feel the power of the sea's force even when it's a hundred metres away.
>
> The canals act as drains, makes me think about drains within the body eg tubes when you're in hospital carrying away the bile, but also used or intravenous introduction of medicine to regenerate the body.
>
> The sound of the water is everywhere, especially at high tide, you can hear the waves against the buildings, licking history away.[609]

In these poetic lines, Watson creates an impression of Venice not as the neutral, static backdrop for the Biennale, but as an accumulation of the effects of water which pervades the city; lapping, rippling, buckling and licking, rather than penetrating. Watson imagines Venice as a body, out of which fluids trickle and run, but also into which medicine, a healing fluid, is introduced. In this way Venice is subject to the constant flow of fluid moving in and out, in and out, with the ebb and flow of the tide. History, in the form of past traces, is very gradually licked away. These are very sensory and imaginative, non-academic descriptions. Watson's imaginings come at least in part from a Waanyi position and their inclusion in the *fluent* catalogue therefore inflects the exhibition with an Aboriginal or Waanyi dimension. I do not mean to elide 'Aboriginal' with 'spiritual' or anything so vague or essentialist, nor to map the authorial biography onto the work or practice, but rather to keep a hold of the artist's Aboriginality or Waanyi worldview at the same time as recognising the affect on and of the encounter with the city. Venice is seen and felt anew in *fluent*, and this at least partly owes to the curatorial framework which is actively shaped by Aboriginal knowledge, and in turn shapes what is understood by Aboriginal knowledge internationally.

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[609] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 13.

Yvonne Koolmatrie

Yvonne Koolmatrie, the third artist of *fluent,* also has a strong cultural connection to water. She is from the 'rural Riverland district of South Australia, [living there] all her life and was one of the two artists responsible for the renaissance of the gravely endangered Ngarrindjeri weaving technique.'[610] Perkins writes, '[i]n *fluent,* Koolmatrie's floating, fragrant and functional woven forms act as a channel between the works of Kngwarreye and Watson, expressing convergence. Koolmatrie's works replicate traditional eel traps but are not used as such.'[611] Speaking of Koolmatrie's work, Watson is quoted in the press coverage, 'People respond to them as cutting edge contemporary art... [In Venice] they just said they're incredibly strong, incredibly beautiful and immediately they could relate to them.'[612] This reflection strongly suggests that the works were hung by the curators in such a way that prompted transformative encounters in a sensitive way (Figure 21). In the press coverage, one journalist that the exhibition space 'is like a stream with lots of different currents... and Yvonne [Koolmatrie]'s weavings really add to that ambience in the space, floating, they look like they're in an environment with water.'[613] In this sense, water is a commonality between Koolmatrie and Watson's work, and the liquidity of Kngwarreye's medium and the 'fluent' effect of paint on canvas.

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 21. Installation shot of *fluent,* Australian Pavilion, 47th Venice Biennale, 1997. Artworks (left) by Emily Kame Kngwarreye; (centre, front) *Eel Traps* by Yvonne Koolmatrie, 1997. Sedge rushes (*lepidosperma cane-sens*). Artist's collection; (right, back) *Blood Vessel* and *Spine* by Judy Watson, 1997. Pigment, pastels and polymer paint on canvas. Mori Gallery and artist's collection. Courtesy AGNSW.

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[610] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.
[611] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 9.
[612] Caroline Chisholm, 'Black and True Blue', *The Daily Telegraph* (Sydney, 1997).
[613] Chisholm.

In 2001 the compilation *KaltjaNOW* was published by Wakefield Press in association with the National Aboriginal Culture Institute—Tandanya, to celebrate and provide insights into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. It features a text about Yvonne Koolmatrie's practice by lecturer Janis Koolmatrie which offers an insight into the kinds of relational formation of ethical responsibilities, and the significance of care. I shall share this extract not in its entirety but in fuller length than an ordinary quotation to convey its integrity as Koolmatrie's account:[614]

> One of Yvonne's many endearing qualities is the way she exalts Indigenous Australian women and in particular her teacher, friend and mentor, the late Dorothy Kartinyeri, Aunty Dorrie, to whom this story is dedicated.
>
> It was through Aunty Dorrie that Yvonne took up the art of weaving, after she had attended a one-day workshop at Raukkan, the ex-mission township of Point McLeay on Lake Alexandrina. This was a day that Yvonne says she will never forget. At the time she was grief-stricken by the untimely death of her beloved son. A group of ladies got together under Aunty Dorrie's guidance. With her patience and careful instruction they were shown the processes of traditional Ngarrindjeri weaving. Aunty Dorrie was determined that these skills should not be lost. Yvonne says that after that day in 1982 she has never looked back, neither in her personal nor professional life.
>
> Sadly, Aunty Dorrie became very sick and was unable to continue her teaching. But her work and cultural instruction have been continued with great passion and commitment by women such as Yvonne.
>
> Yvonne was to find out much about herself through her art. One of those discoveries is that weaving is able to heal a broken or damaged spirit. It can also bring families together in a positive, loving and respectful way. Through her teaching of groups, including inmates at some of the toughest prisons, Yvonne has discovered that weaving can help people to develop their self-esteem and self-respect. She believes that when people lose their culture they also lose their sense of purpose and well-being and their ability to judge what is right and wrong. 'You walk around like a lost soul,' she says.[615]

This account of Koolmatrie's practice shows that through relations to culture and traditional practices, people realise and learn their capacity for moral reasoning. Therefore it might be understood that ethicality is enabled by Ngarrindjeri weaving, as an act of binding and bringing together, and (re)forming relations, which serve to re-ground those who have experienced loss and distancing from community, togetherness and shared values. The reference to healing deepens the scope of this ethicising capability, having resonance as much for individual and familial losses as to losses and traumas inflicted by historical colonialism or its aftermath, or even newer forms of

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[614] In the text, Janis Koolmatrie emphasises Yvonne Koolmatrie's position that some practices by non-Indigenous people, for example imitation of traditional Indigenous weaving or other art forms, amount to theft: 'She believes acts that devalue Indigenous cultural heritage spring from systemic racism, oppression and outright lack of respect for Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous artists. Such practices also mean that non-Indigenous people develop expertise in the Indigenous art and crafts and ultimately become the "gatekeepers" of our cultural heritage, which is our birthright.' Janis Koolmatrie, 'The Ngarrindjeri Weaver', in *KaltjaNOW: Indigenous Arts Australia* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press in association with the National Aboriginal Culture Institute, Tandanya., 2001), pp. 98–103 (p. 103).

[615] p.101 Janis Koolmatrie

colonialism. Indeed sometimes these different kinds of losses are the same in that the effects of colonialism continually reproduces the conditions for loss and perhaps trauma.

The feminine resurfaces in the sense that Yvonne Koolmatrie's practice developed from a relation to Dorothy Kartinyeri, as the senior woman assumed the responsibility to teach the threatened weaving techniques to younger women in a generational form of transmission and education. This responsibility also reveals itself as an act of care, especially in the description of 'Aunty Dorrie's patience and careful instruction.' This does not necessarily evidence an essentialist form of the feminine in the sense of weaving as feminine in and of itself (for example because both women and textiles are self-evidently more 'quaint' or 'domestic' or 'less interesting'), or 'feminine' because women are the ones who traditionally perform this form of labour, although this is also significant. In *Inside the Visible* de Zegher recognised weaving as one aspect or metaphor for relationality among women that has been underrepresented or distorted in the dominant narratives of disciplinary art history and hegemonic cultural spaces. In Koolmatrie's learning from Kartinyeri, and in the Ngarrindjeri weaving itself, we can therefore recognise a kind of generativeness 'in, of, or from, the feminine' in a non-essentialist sense. Koolmatrie's relational practice does not instate a model of relationality derived from de Zegher or affiliated practitioners like Cecilia Vicuña in a secondary sense, but in an instance of affinity, still embedded in its own specificity.

Curatorial premise of 47th Venice Biennale: *Future, Present, Past*

As the exhibition *fluent* was not stand-alone, it is necessary to consider the conceptual framework of the 47th Venice Biennale here. I investigate the Venice Biennale as a historical institution and commercial hub in the next chapter. In 1997, the theme *Future Present Past* was selected by the Biennale Director, critic and curator Germano Celant. He positioned himself *against* the Biennale in his opening introduction to the catalogue for the whole Biennale, which he titled 'Germano Celant vs Biennale di Venezia.' This illustrates not a disdain for the Biennale but a struggle with the historical and ideological formations that he inherited. Nevertheless Celant engaged with these critically and attempted to subvert the parameters the Biennale repeatedly establishes every two years. Celant wondered whether there are any chances of changing the Venice Biennale's 'particular methodological schema, that of arrangement by country which was imposed at the end of the last century.'[616] He explained that the construction of pavilions is determined by a 'political-diplomatic territorialization' that seeks to distinguish art by national configurations. He wrote, 'with the fluctuation of boundaries today, this mapping is in a state of crisis, because it excludes the sorts of overlapping and spillage typical of art, which is always tending to transcend order, identity,

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[616] Germano Celant, 'Germano Celant vs Biennale Di Venezia', in *La Biennale di Venezia. XLVII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. General Catalogue* (Venice: Electa, 1997), pp. xvii–xxix (p. xxii).

separations.'[617] These views evidence a dissatisfaction with modernist processes of epistemological organisation and domination, particularly imperialism and fascism, however they might extend to cover patriarchal and other systems of oppression. Celant did not align himself with any one specific critique, but seemed open to a plurality of critiques.

Celant challenged the historical and nationalistic structure of the 1997 Biennale by planning a flexible curatorial framework that transforms the institutional conventions of time and space. Celant's curatorial theme, *Future Present Past* 'challenges territoriality and seeks to liberate art from the national fold.'[618] Likewise, portraying himself as tasked with defining an approach to the history of contemporary art, Celant avoided presenting material according to a 'chronological sequence,' instead conceptually inverting the direction of time and introducing what he termed a 'temporal horizontality.' The Director explained in his main curatorial statement titled 'Future, Past, Present: A Labyrinth',

> Once we [the curatorial team] decided to move along the axis of time and the development of a language that calls itself into question in terms of its history and its future, the possible directions to take were two opposite ones: towards continuity or towards discontinuity. Both have their risks… We therefore opted for a total mobility, at once finite and limitless, based on the need for an open, plural synthesis, linked with history and with the search for the unknown. Here the individual contributions can exist in an infinite relationship of movement.[619]

Celant's abstracting language and lack of artistic examples destabilized his vision somewhat, perhaps revealing an absence of responsibility towards art historical and curatorial methodologies that require historical specificity and material evidence. I would also argue Celant polarised modernist processes of fixity and postmodern relativism as though these are inevitably part of a dialectical historical process, rather than contested from the times of their inception and shown to be tenuous. That said Celant seemed to chart another space within the Biennale, that was linked with history but also the search for the as-yet unknown, to paraphrase him.

In terms of offering the co-ordinates for a history of contemporary art, Celant's overall framework resonated with *fluent,* which confronted the ongoing insistence that Aboriginal art is not contemporary art, but a living relic of the distant past. By inflecting the Australian Pavilion with an Aboriginal concept of time, which is also thoroughly politicised because it constitutes an anti-colonial act of resistance and survival, the curators did not permit linear time to dominate the way contemporary Aboriginal art is known. Instead the curators redefined the contemporary moment as already co-existing with the time of ancestors, dreaming and Country. But the way the curators built multi-layered epistemological frameworks around the artworks in *fluent* grounds the contemporary moment in the recent colonial past as well. In fact, the curators contended that the colonial past is as

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[617] Celant, 'Germano Celant vs Biennale Di Venezia', p. xxii.

[618] Celant, 'Germano Celant vs Biennale Di Venezia', p. xxii.

[619] Germano Celant, 'Future, Past, Present: A Labyrinth', in *La Biennale di Venezia. XLVII Esposizione Internazionale d'Arte. General Catalogue* (Venice: Electa, 1997), pp. 11–15 (p. 11).

present as ever, in the ways it continues to shape the economic, social and cultural conditions in which Aboriginal people live their lives to a large extent, as well as prevent access to means of healing generationally. Paternalism, indifference, economic exploitation and bigotry are all a reality in cross-cultural Australia, and are symptomatic of colonisation that is always reproducing itself. The effort of *fluent* was to counteract the art historical tendency to over-determine the meaning of artworks according to the linear time and rational, chronological logic of modernism, followed by a break into the seemingly open and unending time of the contemporary. In the light of this, there seems to be a productive crossover between 'Future, Present, Past' and *fluent,* that manifested in a re-examination of the 1990s contemporary moment at the 'centre' of the global art world as in fact a fluid cross-section of other times and other places, but also subject to inflections by the radically unknown and open to new relationships with other forms of contemporary art.

Exhibition venues and archival resources

I collected archival materials on *fluent* from geographically dispersed sites, and present an account of these below according to the 'institution' they represent.

Venice Biennale

I consulted the catalogue for the 47th Venice Biennale for research on *fluent* within the wider biennale: it offers an overview of the main curatorial framework for the biennale, and a contribution by curators from each national pavilion. The overall curatorial premise was to take stock of contemporary art with a view to the shifts and achievements of the twentieth century, although the Celant did postpone this latter aim to the 48th Venice Biennale in 1999 for the Millennium. However, as with other large-scale global recurring exhibitions in 1997 including *Documenta X,* the moment offered a chance to review the century.

The catalogue reveals a strong presence of women curators and artists at other national pavilions and in other art exhibitions, evidencing a range of international feminist-inflected activity at the 47th Venice Biennale. Catherine de Zegher was Commissioner for the Belgian Pavilion, featuring the work of artist Thierry de Cordier. De Zegher's deviation from the catalogue norm, by not contributing a curatorial statement, may convey her ongoing commitment to letting art take centre-stage, rather than the curator's authorial text. Alternatively it may reflect a shift after *Inside the Visible,* it is difficult to say without any curatorial text. Artist Tracey Moffatt exhibited her photographic work in a solo exhibition at the same Venice Biennale (still a part of the Biennale but not in the national pavilions), while the Gamilaraay/Koamu artist Leah King-Smith exhibited her work alongside other men artists in the exhibition *Metamorphosis: Contemporary Australian Aboriginal Photography and Sculpture.* Sara Breiberg-Semel was the Commissioner of the Israeli

Pavilion which evidences curating as a feminist practice in a different sense.[620] Other women artists and curators participated as well, which suggests that *fluent* was not random or isolated in its focus on women or feminist practices within the wider biennale.

The catalogue for the 47th Venice Biennale also can be read for who is markedly absent. Croft said in her interview that the co-curators felt *fluent* was a unique achievement:

> It was actually later that international Indigenous colleagues stated that it would have been unthinkable for the US to have either Indigenous artists or curators representing the US. This is where the international Indigenous connections really came about, from *fluent*, taken up particularly by Canada.[621]

Although the Australian Pavilion had been represented by two Indigenous artists, Trevor Nickolls and Rover Thomas in 1990, this international gap in the archive nevertheless suggests that *fluent* was a progressive gesture in 1997.

Australian Pavilion in Venice

fluent ran from 15 June to 9 November 1997 at the Australian Pavilion in Venice. Archival resources on the 1997 Australian Pavilion are on file at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW), Sydney, because the co-curators made the decision to manage the event's promotion through AGNSW. In terms of the history of the Australian Pavilion more generally, there are no major centralised sources of in-depth historical material at this point in time. However, a new website run by the Australia Council for the Arts, the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body, features detailed information on the exhibition at the 55th Venice Biennale in 2013, so perhaps in time the website will become the first resource for research.[622]

In the Australia Council for the Arts website section titled 'Past Representation', there is a list of all the artists who have represented Australia since 1954, and since the inception of the Australian Pavilion in 1988, the year of Australia's Bicentenary.[623] 1997 stands out as the only occasion on which Aboriginal women artists exhibited at the Australian Pavilion, although several have exhibited in the Biennale outside of the Pavilion. Despite the recent 'curatorial turn,' curators' names are not listed. Other dispersed sources, however, evidence that no Aboriginal women curators have taken the role of curator since 1997. It has been noted that the use of statistics in the analysis of women artists in the 'art world' can be problematic, as statistics are not self-evident, nor self-explanatory.[624]

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[620] See discussion by curator Osnat Zuckerman Rechter on the Israeli Pavilion at the 47th Venice Biennale in her paper *The Central, the Peripheral and the Contra-National: Three women's curatorial strategies in Israel from the 80's of the 20th century until today,* delivered at NORDIK Art History Conference, Stockholm University, 25 October, 2012.

[621] Brenda L Croft, Interview, 2012.

[622] 'Venice Biennale'.

[623] 'Past Representation', *Venice Biennale*, 2012 <http://venicebiennale.australiacouncil.gov.au/venice-biennale-2013/past-representation/> [accessed 5 November 2012].

[624] See for example, Katy Deepwell, 'Statistics about Women Artists in the Art World', *KT Press*, 2011 <http://www.ktpress.co.uk/feminist-art-statistics.asp> [accessed 5 November 2012].

However, according to Katy Deepwell, editor of international feminist art journal *n.paradoxa,* statistics offer one way of monitoring change in the art world.[625] She particularly notes the fluctuating participation of women artists in documenta since the 1990s and registers the ambivalence of whether this constitutes overall change or stagnation.[626] The significance for the overall trajectory of the Australian Pavilion is whether 1997 was a turning point in the politics of representation, or a tokenistic, one-off gesture. This relates to a longer durée than the temporary exhibition, and more to overall programming of the Australian Pavilion and questions of continuity and commitment. In terms of institutional responsibility, this again recalls feminist museum ethics writer Hilde Hein's concept of cumulative ethical responsibility.[627]

To return to the Australia Council for the Arts, it houses no formal archives on the Australian Pavilion *per se*, but staff directed me to the primary archival document for my own research period: the *1997 Venice Biennale: brief for Australian representation,* released by the Visual Arts/Craft Board (VACB) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board (ATSIAB) in 1995, which is held by the National Library of Australia, Canberra. It is a vitally important document for research on *fluent* because it reveals the behind-the-scenes thinking and selection criteria. At the start of the Curatorial Brief, the Australia Council explicitly stated that 1997 offered a 'unique opportunity' to show the work of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists, as it coincided with The Festival of the Dreaming of the Cultural Olympiad of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and the Thirty Year Anniversary of the 1967 referendum, 'which gave Australian citizenship rights to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'[628] Furthermore, 'the Boards suggest that it is appropriate that these artists are indigenous women, as they have not before been shown in Venice.'[629] Three suggestions for proposals included, firstly, that the exhibition be curated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A 'curatorium' could be formed to provide advice or develop the proposal. Secondly, the proposal was suggested to be 'developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with appropriate organisational support from those organisations which have demonstrated a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art in their curatorial appointments and collection management.'[630] Looking forward to the success of *fluent* as a proposal, Hetti Perkins was curator by 1997 at AGNSW so the gallery's support makes sense. The third criteria for exhibition proposals stated that the applications 'must demonstrate curatorial and exhibition experience with appropriate curatorial direction and organisational support', as the curatorial team would be expected to 'promote

[625] Deepwell, 'Statistics about Women Artists in the Art World'.
[626] Deepwell, 'Statistics about Women Artists in the Art World'.
[627] Hilde Hein.
[628] Australia Council and Biennale di Venezia, *1997 Venice Biennale : Brief for Australian Representation* (Strawberry Hills, N.S.W.: Australia Council for the Arts, 1995), p. 1.
[629] Australia Council and Biennale di Venezia, p. 1.
[630] Australia Council and Biennale di Venezia, p. 1.

the event and represent Australia in an ambassadorial role whilst in Venice.'[631] The insistence on organisational and institutional support at once ensures and protects Australia's image abroad, but also provides training, backing and resources where there might be a gap. In the early 1990s there were comparatively few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curators in permanent positions in institutions so this could be read as an educational device, offering a comprehensive opportunity to 'learn the ropes' at the international level. While these support structures protect the Australia Council, I do not think they should be read for the total institutionalisation of Aboriginal curatorial practice. This would be at odds with the main concept of *fluent*, primarily a claim for the consistency and continuity of Aboriginal cultural practice in mainstream contemporary art world centres like Venice, as opposed to an assimilationist reading of its corruption by contemporary culture. A closer examination of the role of the 'curatorium' rationalises the need for support structures. The Australia Council Brief explained:

> The curatorium will be responsible for working with the artists throughout the project to install the exhibition, in addition to exhibition management, including budget control and supervision, preparation of the building within the local ordinances, freighting (if required), managing the event, operating and monitoring of day to day operations, production of support materials (such as background catalogue on the artists), education program (if appropriate), packing and crating (if appropriate), publicity/promotion (including the engagement of a professional publicist), and sponsorship.[632]

Clearly the volume of curatorial work requires support. Further, the terms set out in the brief were highly responsive to the impetus for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-representation, particularly of and by women. There were, however, apparently accusations of political correctness in the press when *fluent* was accepted, although I have found relatively little evidence of this. Despite Croft herself saying in my interview that these voices were 'naysayers,' and also John McDonald's article, there is a possibility that they may be read as concerns for the sustained involvement of Aboriginal women in the arts, as much as reactionary accusations.[633] 'Political correctness' is a device of conservative rhetoric, but dismissing critical voices on these grounds might miss the important question of whether Aboriginal women representing Australia once is enough to ensure dedicated and prolonged support. That said an actual reading might suggest a different case.

The Australia Council for the Arts brief also includes images and floor plans of the Australian Pavilion building at the time (it is being rebuilt in 2013). These portray the design that was so constraining for previous curators, although Croft has said that she and Perkins attempted to work with the curves to accentuate the exhibition's visual fluidity.[634]

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[631] Australia Council and Biennale di Venezia, p. 1.

[632] Australia Council and Biennale di Venezia, p. 7.

[633] Croft, 'Interview'; John McDonald, 'The Dream Weavers', *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 10 January 1998), section Spectrum Arts.

[634] Unfortunately the quality of these images is too poor for reproduction, as they are photocopied in the first place.

The AGNSW and other Australian venues

The exhibition was installed at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) in Sydney from 20 December 1997— 15 February 1998. The archival material on file at AGNSW is extensive. It includes press releases developed for Venice and Australia, in which the text is the same but the practical information is different. There are colour installation photographs showing the placement and lighting of works inside the Pavilion (Figures 19 and 21). A number of promotional photographs show the Vernissage, which includes the artists Koolmatrie and Watson with their works, and preparations for the accompanying performance in the exhibition space and around the Giardini by the late dancer Russell Page (Figures 20 and 22). In 2010, in an article on Perkins' practice in *The Australian,* journalist Jill Rowbotham wrote of Perkins' memory of this moment,

> Perkins fondly remembers her dear friend, dancer Russell Page, literally leading crowds in a merry gig towards the building where the Australian exhibit was housed. "He was electrifying; like a pied piper he lured people through the winding streets, over footbridges and through the Giardini to our pavilion."[635]

Archival images also depict the curators together with the Australian Ambassador Rory Steele and his wife Mrs Steele; Mr Michael Lynch, then General Manager of the Australia Council and Mr Edmund Capon, then Director of AGNSW both pictured with Kngwarreye's work. Dr Sue-Anne Wallace, then Director of Audience Development and Advocacy Division of the Australia Council, and Belinda Hanrahan, Marketing Manager at AGNSW are also pictured, along with other participants in the installation and media launch of *fluent* (Figure 23).

Image removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 22. Judy Watson painting up Russell Page, *fluent,* Australian Pavilion, 47th Venice Biennale, 1997. Artwork *Spine,* by Judy Watson, 1997. Pigment, pastels, polymer paint on canvas. Artist's collection. Collection of the Mori Gallery. Courtesy AGNSW and Rayma Johnson. We can see that the spine motif on Page's back mirrors the spine of Watson's painting. This suggests relations between bodies, art forms, and media, and the meanings of Watson's work.

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[635] Jill Rowbotham, 'Soul Searcher', *The Australian*, 16 January 2010.

Figure 23. Publicity photograph for *fluent*, showing (left to right) Victoria Lynn, Australian Ambassador Rory Steele and his wife Mrs Steele, Brenda L Croft and Hetti Perkins at Australian Pavilion, 47th Venice Biennale, 1997. Courtesy AGNSW.

The AGNSW archive also holds Publicity Report from the 47th Venice Biennale developed by Claire Martin, Publicity Officer at AGNSW in January 1997 which recounts the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation of publicity for *fluent*, including a series of objectives and recommendations. This is an extraordinary resource for bringing the exhibition to life.

In the Publicity Report, one main revelation was that there had been an 'initial disappointing reaction about the choice of the Australian exhibition' which ties into some press coverage, explored below. Another key point is that the institutional support structures were not as effective as they needed to be, which had an impact in the dissemination of information about the exhibition. For example, one recommendation reads:

> It was disappointing and a missed opportunity that in the six months preceding Venice the Australia Council were not forthcoming with funds to support the making of a documentary

about the exhibition including coverage of Venice for news. The nature of the exhibition and the current national interest in Aboriginal issues both political and cultural (eg. Year of the Dreaming etc) would have made an excellent thirty minute documentary. To optimise local electronic coverage it is vital to have a reporter and crew on hand in Venice. It is essential that the footage be sent to all Australian channels the day of the opening.[636]

Venice Biennale as an institution is well known for being organised extremely rapidly, of which the absence of a documentary could be a symptom.[637] However the potential risk for participating artists and curators is a lack of support or promotional system, which makes the exhibition less effective. The double risk for artists or curators of any minority, whether women, Indigenous or otherwise, is that this gap can manifest as institutional sexism or racism. This is a difficult problem to pinpoint because it can occur through neglect or oversight, rather than a targeted attack that is unambiguously racist or sexist. In the case of *fluent* however the archive reads as though the exhibition was largely conceived in supportive circumstances.

Following AGNSW, the next venues to which *fluent* travelled were numerous; in fact all the Australian states' and territories' capital cities bar Darwin and Brisbane. These were the Drill Hall Gallery, Canberra, 13 Mar— 3 May 1998; followed by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 5 June— 5 July 1998; Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Hobart, 17 July— 6 September 1998; Tandanya, Adelaide, 26 September— 8 November, 1998; and lastly the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth, 20 November 1998— 31 January 1999. At the final venue, there was no overlap with *Inside the Visible,* which had left by early April, 1997. *fluent* would have adapted to each venue differently like *Inside the Visible,* although shifted meanings to a lesser extent because the travelling venues were all Australian. Not all of these venues were major galleries however; Tandanya is an Aboriginal-run space. The AGNSW Publicity Report did recommend that:

> The curators and [AGNSW] Project Co-ordinator will promote to existing contacts nationally for the exhibition tour to stimulate involvement. Each tour venue will be encouraged to pursue their relevant Aboriginal art and community groups for involvement officially or via attendance at the exhibition.[638]

This shows at the very least nominal support for increased Aboriginal involvement in the art world.

Other archival resources

The catalogue

The major resource for studying *fluent* is the catalogue. Like the first case study on *Inside the Visible*, I address the catalogue later in the chapter, because I try to avoid privileging the text and allowing it to over-determine the archive. The catalogue is a 51-page colour publication published by AGNSW and the Arts Council. It features a single essay written by Hetti Perkins, along with

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[636] Claire Martin, 'Publicity Report' (AGNSW, 1997), p. 7, AGNSW Archive.

[637] Eg Martha Rosler in conversation

[638] Martin, p. 13.

photographs of the artists and of Australian landscapes, without caption but presumably from each artist's Country. Two of these photographs show sticks and dead trees arising from a river, which visually resembles the iconic image of the gondola poles on the typical waterway of Venice, while others show cracked earth, shell middens, a weather-beaten log and plants growing in dry scrubby landscape. Each of these photographs shows the changing weather and presence/imprint of water in one way or another. Following the essay, which is illustrated with photographs of the artists and their past works, there are larger, more detailed reproductions of the artworks that were included in the exhibition. A map of Australia follows, with each artist's Country highlighted and labelled, followed by a list of selected exhibitions and achievements for each artist.

The catalogue essay, titled 'fluent,' differs in aim from *Inside the Visible*. Perkins does not aim to destabilise and deconstruct the curatorial statement format of the traditional catalogue essay as de Zegher does in *Inside the Visible*. Instead Perkins embraces the declarative statement and uses it concisely to claim contemporaneity for the work of the three selected artists. This does not undermine the complexity of the catalogue essay but shifts the emphasis onto translatability and reaching a wide international audience with little experience of Aboriginal art.

Firstly, Perkins outlines the curatorial concept of the exhibition as explored in the analysis of the exhibition title above, making the initial statement about excellence, contemporaneity and Indigenous specificity. Next Perkins suggests Yvonne Koolmatrie's woven eel traps act as a channel between the other works, expressing their convergence, and 'weaving together... different stories and journeys, from the past to the present and into the future.'[639] The catalogue essay expands on these different and interrelated stories and journeys, showing the distinctive relationships each artist has with their heritage, and how these relate to their artistic practice.

Perkins emphasises the 'spectrum of indigenous experience,' challenging stereotypes of Aboriginal artists by raising Koolmatrie's rural community environment, Kngwarreye's birth in the bush and her achievement as the first Aboriginal artist to be awarded the Australian Artists Creative Fellowship, and Watson's training in a formal system of accreditation.[640] In terms of media too, the artworks do not elide with traditional art historical hierarchies, but 'test the parameters of western and Indigenous art traditions.'[641] Perkins writes that Kngwarreye and Watson 'contribute to a new discourse between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural disciplines. Theirs is a form of narrative abstraction that uses a discrete visual language to describe a country where Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds co-exist.'[642] She explains,

> On one level their iconography is loaded with meaning as part of an Indigenous methodology yet on the other hand has a less literal, esoteric purpose; evoking an Australian landscape haunted by its colonial history. Kngwarreye's and Watson's work may be interpreted as

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[639] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 9.
[640] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.
[641] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.
[642] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.

metaphors for the diverse and often imperceptible spiritual interconnectedness between indigenous people and their country.[643]

Similarly, Koolmatrie is said to have an

> [I]ntuitive process that allows the sculptural potential of the eel trap to be realised in spirited interpretations of traditional forms. Yet it is not the artist's intention to refute what has gone before, but to extend traditional parameters and continually redefine extant models. Some of her objects have not been created for almost a century; a sign of the colonial dislocation of Indigenous cultural practices.[644]

An entirely different ethic arises in the catalogue of *fluent* to that of *Inside the Visible,* in terms of Perkins' striving for clarity within language, whereas de Zegher aimed to play with and counteract the authority of language. Perkins can be understood as performatively enacting a politics of recognition and visibility in her writing, suggesting a pedagogical responsibility but also a commitment to refusing repression and marginalisation. Perkins concludes her essay with the statement,

> *fluent* demonstrates the ability of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Yvonne Koolmatrie and Judy Watson to draw on and be sustained by a continuous cultural heritage while developing a means of expressing their individuality within this tradition. The work of artists like Kngwarreye, Koolmatrie and Watson challenges the self-reflexivity of western art traditions that for so long excluded, denigrated and appropriated Aboriginal art. The possibilities of Aboriginal art practice are infinite and can have relevance and resonance outside their immediate cultural context while maintaining the integrity of speaking from within that context. We belong to this country; always have, always will.[645]

The reference to self-reflexivity of Western art traditions conveys a strong position against white and European Australian artistic practices that freely appropriated iconography from Indigenous artworks without assuming any responsibility for seeking permission or even acknowledging the possible offence or damage in some cases, for example where imagery may reveal sacred knowledge. This happened historically but the practice continues. This is a different form of self-reflexivity that de Zegher enacts in her curatorial writing to position and situate knowledge. Perkins could be said to enact self-reflexivity in the sense of situating Aboriginal subjectivity within two worlds at once that co-exist, forming the field into which the selected artwork contributes and intervenes, but also shaping the production of work itself.

Press coverage, 1997-8

The available press coverage of *fluent* evidences a range of voices in the lead-up to the Australia Council's decision to select *fluent* from the pool of applications, as well as a range of responses to the exhibition after it opened. Before the exhibition was selected, critic Brook Turner wrote an article titled 'Controversy simmers over Venice Biennale decisions' for the *Sydney Morning Herald.* She reported that 'while the original Australia Council brief envisaged a nine-woman show,

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[643] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 11.
[644] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 12.
[645] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 20.

all three short-listed proposals are for smaller shows, one involving six artists and the others three or less.' Turner writes that this caused controversy 'among the indigenous arts community.' Specifically,

> Several artists and curators have expressed disappointment at the short-listed proposals. Some are specifically concerned that a male curator [Djon Mundine] and a non-ATSI female curator [perhaps Victoria Lynn], have been short-listed, while others warned more broadly that the 1997 Venice Biennale will end up spotlighting a couple of artists and curators at the expense of a wider survey of the diversity of indigenous women's art.[646]

This highlights the divergence of possible effects between the formats of the survey exhibition, and the smaller group exhibition of individuals' work. Turner quotes an unnamed artist, who comments that,

> Notionally, you have to support [the Australia Council brief] because it is going to display anything... If it just picks a couple of indigenous female artists and makes them famous, good luck to them. But, ultimately, it should be a strong indigenous female statement that reflects what is happening in Australia today, and two perspectives aren't really enough.[647]

There are pitfalls of an exhibition being representative, including the expectation that artworks reflect or convey a known and finite phenomenon, which makes demands of artworks that they are perhaps not able to fulfil. However the reality for (some) indigenous artists was that exhibiting in this way—representing Australia internationally— was a meaningful act. The comment that 'two perspectives aren't really enough' underlines the fact that a certain level of representation is desirable. While curating is always selective by nature anyway, there are clearly contested limits to how this takes place: upper and lower limits on the number of artists selected; the variation of content, themes or material.

John McDonald, art critic for the *Sydney Morning Herald,* also reported on controversy at the news of the Australia Council brief, but within the wider Australian 'art world' as opposed to within Indigenous circles. He writes, 'from the beginning, the noises were not promising. The Australia Council... proposal... provoked howls of political correctness, and the suspicion that Australia was thinking about the Biennale in terms of its own conscience, rather than more objective criteria.'[648] I could not find evidence of said accusations of political correctness—they may have been expressed in closed circles, off record— however this tension obviously impacted on McDonald, who writes that he turned up at the pavilion 'expecting the worst.' However, he 'was surprised by the presentation and the atmosphere of the exhibition.'[649] He was impressed by the exhibition's 'slick' corporate branding, apart from the 'silly title.'[650] McDonald did respond well to the curatorial installation, which helped

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[646] Brook Turner, 'Controversy Simmers over Venice Biennale Decisions', *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 14 April 1996), section News and Features, p. 15 (p. 15).

[647] Turner, p. 15.

[648] McDonald, 'The Dream Weavers', p. 14.

[649] McDonald, 'The Dream Weavers', p. n.pag.

[650] John McDonald, 'Hidden Shallows', *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 20 June 1997), section Spectrum, p. 14 (p. n.pag).

Australia stand out from other countries. In particular, McDonald noticed the dramatic lighting in the space, which made the best of the awkward split-level pavilion which otherwise tends to cramp the artworks. Making reference to the Belgian pavilion, curated by de Zegher, McDonald wrote,

> Alongside this brooding grotesquerie, the Australian pavilion seemed almost comforting in its familiarity. The curators had ... turned the lights off, with individual works being picked out by spotlights. This worked surprisingly well, with Judy Watson's pigment paintings gaining a dramatic aspect I had never seen before, and Emily Kngwarreye's stripes appearing even more stark and raw.[651]

McDonald did feel as though Koolmatrie's works crowded the space, although this may reflect more on the constricting design of the pavilion. For McDonald, overall, *fluent* 'came across as a self-contained, aesthetically complete experience.'[652] This puts paid to the initial 'howls of political correctness' in one way, but McDonald does not reflect on the ideological underpinnings of them.

Sebastian Smee, another white critic reporting for the *Sydney Morning Herald*, also thought *fluent* was exceptional. He wrote,

> Most critics thought that the Biennale as a whole had a sluggish, slapped-together, end-of-the-millennium aura. The Australian pavilion, with its focus on indigenous Australians, stood apart, if only because it spoke up openly for an art that strives for a connection with place.[653]

Smee's only criticism was that:

> In its earnest attempts to cover all bases and then to create connections threading everything together, *fluent* does feel a little over-curated (especially its cutely lowercase title). The rhetoric—spoken and implied—does promise a tad more than it delivers.[654]

However his closing remark is that the exhibition is 'good nonetheless.'[655] The tabloid press was also largely sympathetic to *fluent*. Caroline Chisholm, reporting for the *Daily Telegraph*, wrote that *fluent* was the 'celebrated' entry for Australia at Venice, although her article is brief. After offering an insight into the curatorial framework and Watson's artistic methods, Chisholm writes: 'Perkins and Watson agree that this is one way of countering stereotypes about Aboriginal art, which are often seen in the mainstream press.' She then quotes Perkins:

> We are not just propped up in front of canvasses to paint... People don't say to us: 'Oh you can weave a basket' and we go weave a basket. Aboriginal people are not just the victims of dealers and victims of anthropologists.[656]

This is an important point but the challenge to the mainstream press is ironic. The *Daily Telegraph* is run by News Corporation, owned by Rupert Murdoch. It may be the case that the final comment is a provocative and reactionary dig at 'bleeding heart liberals' who are perceived by some

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[651] McDonald, 'Hidden Shallows', p. n.pag.

[652] McDonald, 'Hidden Shallows', p. n.pag.

[653] Sebastian Smee, 'Venetian Finds', *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, 19 December 1997), section Metro, p. 5 (p. 5).

[654] Smee, p. 5.

[655] Smee, p. 5.

[656] Chisholm.

to promote a 'guilt industry.'[657] The rhetoric of the 'black armband view of history' emerged around 1988 in a backlash against demonstrations of mourning that were organised to counter the celebratory tone of the Bicentenary, and expanded into a wider debate compounded by parliamentary politics.[658] Journalist John Pilger explained in 2011,

> In railing against what it called the 'black armband view' of Australia's past, the conservative government of John Howard encouraged and absorbed the views of white supremacists — that there was no genocide, no Stolen Generation, no racism; indeed, whites are the victims of 'liberal racism'. A collection of far-right journalists, minor academics and hangers-on became the antipodean equivalent of David Irving Holocaust deniers. Their platform has been the Murdoch press.[659]

Substantial criticism was levelled at the exhibition by only one reviewer, Susan McCulloch, a white art historian/critic and author of *McCulloch's Encyclopaedia of Australian Art* McCulloch wrote the article 'A nation's dearth in Venice' for *The Australian,* Australia's only national newspaper, also owned by News Corporation. Her argument is that the selection of artworks in *fluent* was not up to speed with the contemporaneous state of societal harmony in Australia. She writes:

> The problem of Australia's participation in this Biennale goes far beyond [...select] works. First is the statement made by their selection. Aboriginal art is at a pivotal point in its development, which Australia ought to take the opportunity to promote in an international context. Having already announced to the world through the Rover Thomas and Trevor Nickolls 1990 exhibit that we have both urban and land-based artists, this was the perfect time to show, as is so frequently done in Australia, that Aboriginal art is no longer regarded as a separate, marginalised form but as part of the contemporary Australian art as a whole.[660]

The comment that Aboriginal art is no 'longer regarded as... marginalised' suggests dissatisfaction with any discordance that might be communicated on the international stage. McCulloch almost plays out McDonald's comment in his review that 'the Howard Government would obviously like to proclaim that everything is just dandy, with black and white Australians living in peace and harmony.'[661] McCulloch is right in a way that the national psyche was changing, but her view is perhaps more reactionary than progressive. The fact that no Aboriginal women had before exhibited or curated in Venice did not warrant a women-only exhibition in 1997. Her overall position becomes clearer as she continues:

> Organisation and cost issues also need addressing. Trips to Venice are very nice and, obviously, putting on the Biennale requires someone to take on this arduous task. But do we need three top-level curators to put together an uncomplicated show that any one of them, one would hope, could do in a week or two? Let alone sending three, four or more other administrators from Australia for various periods?[662]

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[657] Mark McKenna, 'Different Perspectives on Black Armband History' (Parliamentary Library, 1997) <http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/RP9798/98RP05>.

[658] McKenna.

[659] John Pilger, 'How the Murdoch Press Keeps Australia's Dirty Secret', *johnpilger.com*, 2011.

[660] Susan McCulloch, 'A Nation's Dearth in Venice', *The Australian*, 21 June 1997, section Arts, The Weekend Review, p. 13 (p. 13).

[661] McDonald, 'The Dream Weavers'.

[662] McCulloch, p. 13.

This grossly understates the work and intellectuality involved in curating, particularly at Venice Biennale. Although it is frequently touted as the most prestigious art event in the world, Venice Biennale is renowned for being rapidly organised in an extremely short timeframe.[663] The location might be 'romantic', but curating for the Biennale is clearly not a holiday. McCulloch concludes her article by asking, 'if all we can produce for the Biennale is a polite little show that would hardly raise an eyebrow in Australia, is there any justification for a $650 000 to $700 000 budget?'[664] Her lack of generosity, not in terms of expenditure but by barely engaging the exhibition's premise and then dismissing it, may indicate an unexamined anxiety about the practices of Croft and Perkins. McCulloch does endorse another possible format for the exhibition:

> [A] group of nine Aboriginal women to paint the walls of the pavilion during the Biennale, [which] would then have been dismantled and sold in Australia... this would have provided funding for a new pavilion [and] created a vibrant art event and attracted huge international media attention.[665]

Despite easing McCulloch's concern about the cost—which are not usually so remarked upon in reviews—this format still would have adhered to the all-Aboriginal format with which she takes issue.

Another article, by art critic Bronwyn Watson titled 'Kith, Kin and Country' in *The Bulletin* is by no means negative, as she reports that *fluent* was 'generally considered an extremely successful show.'[666] Watson does however delve into the prevalence of attitudes like McCulloch's. After a brief but insightful discussion of *fluent*, she leads into the relationship between the exhibition and the state of race relations back in Australia. She writes, 'Perkins and Croft say it was wonderful to see people in Europe respond so well to the work, especially since *fluent* was held during a time of huge political and cultural changes for Aboriginal people.'[667] Watson quotes Perkins,

> When we were in Venice, we kept getting daily news bulletins about the stolen generations and native title. Sometimes we felt it was hypocritical that Australia was representing itself internationally with Aboriginal art at the same time as it was attempting to legislatively sever those connections that Aboriginal people do have with their country.[668]

Watson also reports that 'given *fluent*'s success overseas, both Perkins and Croft are angry at the way Aboriginal art has been featured recently in the media,' making reference to recent claims about the Utopia artist Kathleen Petyarre's paintings actually being made by a white person. Croft is quoted,

> I think it has been a witch hunt of Kathleen... Underlying all this is an assumption, which goes beyond the visual arts scene, that you can't trust them, they lie, they cheat. I'm getting sick of it.

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[663] See for example, McDonald, 'Hidden Shallows', p. 14.
[664] McCulloch, p. 13.
[665] McCulloch, p. 13.
[666] Bronwyn Watson, 'Kith, Kin and Country', *The Bulletin*, 3 February 1998, section Arts, pp. 62–63 (p. 62).
[667] Watson, p. 63.
[668] Watson, p. 63.

I think there is this attitude that Aboriginal artists have had it easy, that they haven't worked for it and I find it quite insulting.[669]

Watson next quotes Perkins, who suggests that *fluent* has been an antidote to the 'smear campaign that is being generated in this country against Aboriginal art.'[670]

In terms of more scholarly art publications, a few reviews covered *fluent* and generally responded well. Journalist John Slavin begins his article 'Notes towards the end of time: The Venice Biennale' for *Art Monthly Australia* with an account of the ethos of the Biennale's Director, Germano Celant. For Slavin, Celant is faced with an intellectual problem, that of trying to make sense of 'our postmodern cultural tradition,' itself shifting ground, but compounded by the Biennale itself: 'grounded in a city whose very existence is a rhetorical gesture of constant, elegant disavowal of nature, contingency and change.'[671] Less interested in postmodernism, however, or the 'nineteenth century concept of identity, and of territorial and cultural control,' for Slavin Celant is more focussed on multiculturalism, which he negotiates as though a traveller through space. 'Multiculturalism is more widespread [than postmodernism], therefore more international, while retaining its relative, regional qualities. We therefore have to consider a very large map.'[672] Also, Celant is quoted: 'Space is infinitely varied. I possess a star map but in space there is no concept of coherent, absolute time.'[673]

Slavin works this reading of Celant into his discussion of the Australian exhibition, which he calls 'distinctive.' For Slavin, *fluent* 'amply fulfils Celant's theme of *future, present, past*, playing with ideas about memory, culture, archetypes, chthonic markings and elegant modernist aesthetics.'[674] The longer view of cultural history helps Slavin make sense of the interventions of *fluent.* Slavin also considers the exhibition ironic, because 'at a moment when Aboriginal participation in our history is being officially denied, we are represented nationally by three Aboriginal women artists.'[675] This observation affirms Croft and Perkins' feelings about 1997, reported by Watson.

In his detailed descriptions of the artworks, Slavin does not quite reach the same level of sensitivity that is communicated in the *fluent* catalogue by Perkins, although he is clearly working out how to think and talk about the works' culturally-specific meanings. For example his description of Kngwarreye's work uses some slightly outdated concepts and language:

At one level these paintings are simply a celebration of colour and line and surface. Like Paul Klee, Kngwarreye is taking a line for a walk. They may be read also as corroboree insignia

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[669] Watson, p. 63.

[670] Watson, p. 63.

[671] John Slavin, 'Notes towards the End of Time: The Venice Biennale', *Art Monthly Australia*, 102 (1997), 10–13 (p. 10).

[672] Slavin, p. 10.

[673] Slavin, p. 10.

[674] Slavin, p. 11.

[675] Slavin, p. 11.

reduced to their essential intent, as song lines, as force fields across an empty, experiential void, as waves of cosmic forces and therefore as signifyers [sic] of mystical visions.[676]

The implied empty space of the desert and signifiers of mysticism swerve very close to the stereotypes of *terra nullius* and Aboriginal world-views as exotic and 'magical'. Rather than engage with the Anmatyerre-specific yam dreaming that Perkins conveys in the catalogue, Slavin seems more comfortable using generalisations. These help him ask the question that fundamentally stumps him:

> One of the problems of this exhibition, apart from its Australian specificity, which I think baffles many visitors, is that it's very difficult to separate the aesthetic qualities of these works from their associations with day-to-day tribal life, religion and a particular experience of landscape. How international is the aesthetic dimension?[677]

Surely Australian specificity is expected in the Australian pavilion, so that seems unfounded. But that Slavin asks questions about universality and aesthetic frameworks is central to the work of *fluent*. In a similar vein, he asks:

> How good are these paintings as paintings? How much do they rely on Western aestheticization of arcane symbolic and totemic marks; to what extent do they represent a massive cultural appropriation? Can works of art exist both as tribal religious artifacts and as aesthetic objects? There are no easy answers, but the evidence seems to suggest they can. [678]

These questions show a sincere engagement with the works and the exhibition's main objective, to put the case that Aboriginal art is also contemporary art, or vice versa. Slavin's language and easy categorisations about tribal and religious objects *not* being art *already* initially appear to miss the point of *fluent*: to highlight that 'contemporary art' as a general category is culturally-determined to favour white/Western/European art, but here are some contemporary works by Aboriginal artists that in fact might shift or inflect current understandings of what contemporary art actually is. Some more engagement with Celant's dynamic space/time methodology might have helped Slavin negotiate the premise of *fluent,* however overall he largely meditates on the key issues. Although a little awkward with its use of less-appropriate language, his review does attempt to untangle some of the main issues of translation and fluency, which means that *fluent* was speaking relatively coherently to those new to the field. In fact overall the comparatively high number of favourable commentary shows that *fluent* was aiming largely on target: the majority of Australian and British reviewers were responsive to the orientations of the exhibition, confirming its success in another way.

Review of literature

The key statements on *fluent* are substantial and engaged; they are, however, surprisingly few, which is significant. Hannah Fink and Hetti Perkins produced 'Writing for Land' for *Art and Australia* in 1997, reflecting on the contradictions that made the year so complex but significant. They quoted Geeta Kapur's comment, noted above, that *fluent* was an outcome of 'complete irony' in

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[676] Slavin, p. 11.
[677] Slavin, p. 11.
[678] Slavin, p. 11.

regards to 'a nation representing itself with a people so recently undisenfranchised.' This irony, and the threatened challenges to land rights legislation produced 'a heightened sense of reality among indigenous and non-indigenous Australians, a consciousness in the making.'[679] Perkins and Fink also briefly established two sites of this consciousness in the making: the art market and artistic abstraction. They wrote, 'rather than looking at the art market as an exploitative imposition on Aboriginal culture, it can be regarded as a meeting place between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal values.'[680] Likewise 'the language of abstraction presents another kind of meeting place, a point of convergence between the visual languages of western (or European) and indigenous cultures.'[681] I would argue that these statements distilled the complexity of *fluent* into its most pressing strategic interventions, consolidating them in the discourse.

In 1998, Brenda Croft's article 'Where ancient waterways and dreams intertwine' was published in the journal *periphery*. This reflection may be considered a part of the archival material because it reveals facts relating to the exhibition, for example visitor responses and behind-the-scenes thinking, but as part of the literature it also compounds (the curator's view of) the exhibition's place in the cultural psyche of Venice and Australia at the time. Croft noted that *fluent*'s 'intrinsically sensual and feminine aspects were commented upon, especially pertinent in a sensual and feminine city such as Venice, where one's own sight, sound, touch, taste and scent are all heightened by the incredible surroundings.'[682] For this reason, Croft wrote that,

> These were moments experienced by thousands of people who visited the pavilion and will be experienced by many more people during its national tour. People overseas can comprehend indigenous Australians' contemporaneity, our ability to operate on a world stage, our specifically Australian essence, and also respect that our ancient cultural traditions are intrinsic to our present and our future. They applaud us for it. They value it. They honour it.[683]

This statement suggests that from the curator's viewpoint the exhibition's ambitions had been achieved. From 1997 onwards, however, *fluent* was given less critical attention. Curator and art historian Sally Butler's doctoral thesis, *Emily Kngwarreye and the Enigmatic Object of Discourse* (2002) offered an account of *fluent* in terms of contemporaneous cultural politics in the mid-1990s within a wider exploration of the representation of Kngwarreye. Butler argued that the curatorial theme of fluidity signified a wider discursive emphasis on the instability and ambiguity of Aboriginal art, pitched against the problematic concept of its authenticity. For Butler, 'few critics share the curators' vision of "subtle connections" and "ebb and flow."'[684] Her diagnosis that the artistic and cultural connections proposed in *fluent* were 'perhaps too subtle' suggests a breakdown in the exhibition's intelligibility. While Butler cited one critic's puzzled response from 1998, Jeanette

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[679] Fink and Perkins, p. 63.
[680] Fink and Perkins, p. 63.
[681] Fink and Perkins, p. 63.
[682] Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', p. 12.
[683] Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', p. 12.
[684] Sally Butler, 'Emily Kngwarreye and the Enigmatic Object of Discourse', p. 111.

Hoorn's article 'Biennale Highlights' in the journal *Art and Australia,* she did not consult other material.[685] For me the exhibition catalogue and archive, as well as the subsequent statements by Perkins and Fink and Croft in the public domain, seem very clear that the concept of fluidity opposes fixity, but emphasises specificity at the same time as disclosing and forging relations between artists, cultural contexts and the international art world. Furthermore, these sources suggest that the exhibition could be considered effective. For example, Croft stated that according to the Venice Biennale press office, '*fluent* received more favourable coverage than any other pavilion, other than the Italian pavilion.'[686] It is difficult to ascertain the significance of Butler's position because her thesis has not yet been published, although it was digitised in 2012. It stands as inconclusive evidence, perhaps revealing one reason why the exhibition does not register more in the literature, but equally suggesting that a brief reading of the exhibition that does not draw on the wider archive cannot fully reflect the full spectrum of critics' responses or necessarily diagnose the exhibition's efficacy.

Currently, the only sustained analysis in the public domain I can locate from 2000 onwards is Gwen Horsfield's talk 'Emily in Venice: Australian art and identity at the 1997 Venice Biennale' at the symposium *Emily: 'Why do those fellas paint like me...?'* (22-23 August 2008) which was organised by Elder Agnes Shea, Margo Neale and Dennis Grant as part of the program for the exhibition *Utopia: The Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye* (2008), curated by Margo Neale at the National Museum of Australia. The symposium has been transcribed and is available on the museum's website. Horsfield was a doctoral student at the time. In her talk she contextualised *fluent* within the historical and socio-political contradictions noted by Geeta Kapur and Perkins in 1996 and 1997 respectively. Horsfield commented,

> Although the curatorial rationale of *fluent* was to demonstrate the endurance and continuity of Aboriginal culture, the irony of presenting this within an implicitly nationalist forum was not lost on international audiences. Critics were impressed by Emily's work but described Australia's overall contribution as 'introspective', 'reformist' and 'uncourageous'... At home the critical response struck an uneasy balance between praise - citing the unfailing appeal of Indigenous art to international audiences - and censure for 'projecting our political priorities into an uncaring international showcase.' I think that one was from John McDonald.[687]

Horsfield also noted the irritation and frustration felt by many that Aboriginal imagery was used on international corporate and government branding, saturating the same arena in which debates about authenticity and the value of Aboriginal art played out. She offered further evidence of the irony by explaining that 1997 'was not an especially triumphant one for the Aboriginal arts industry,' as 'budget cuts of $350 million in state funding to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission were announced':

> The impact of these financial constraints was felt substantially by art centres established by Aboriginal women's councils throughout remote areas of Western Australia, South Australia

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[685] Jeanette Hoorn, 'Biennale Highlights: The 47th Venice Biennale', *Art & Australia*, 35 (1998), 336.
[686] Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', p. 12.
[687] Horsfield.

and the Northern Territory, in some cases resulting in a lack of electricity and running water. Charges of official tokenism abounded for, in the words of Jo Dyer, 'at the same time that the federal government is parading Indigenous people and cultures on the world stage, they are ripping our funding to bits.'[688]

This talk is valuable because it offers insights into *fluent*'s intelligibility and reduced capacity to prompt widespread change, enriching a historical understanding of *fluent*'s moment with detail afforded by more proximity in time and space than my own position can articulate. The efficacy of *fluent* and its ability to register in the discourse as an effective intervention were clearly compromised by the contradictory circumstances of Australia's embrace of the art industry in commercial terms.

Horsfield's talk is so significant because it concentrates on the socio-political context of the Australian Pavilion as an ambassadorial and commercial opportunity at Venice Biennale, foregrounding the complexities of Indigenous participation in Venice which I explore further in the next chapter. Because this talk stands almost alone as the major account of *fluent* since its curators reflected on its effects in 1997-8, the agency of the curators and the integrity of the exhibition as a strategic intervention are in eclipse.

If this is an ethical question that can be understood in terms of the distribution of responsibility, I would suggest responsibility for permitting the exhibition's efficacy and agency of the curators into visibility is not just on the curators to produce legible statements and transformative effects, but (also) on those closest to the exhibition in terms of providing support and resources, along with those representing the field whether in critical reviews in the media, or commentary in the art literature. This is not to cast a moral judgment as to who should do what, but to read for a silence that could be an absence of cumulative ethical responsibility, to recall Hilde Hein's term and apply it to a context beyond an institution's programming.

I have written an article titled '*fluent* in Venice: contemporary Aboriginal art beyond the 'urban/desert' paradigm' (2014) forthcoming in a special issue of *Interventions: international journal of postcolonial studies*. This follows a presentation at *The Postcolonial City* conference (2-3 February, 2012) at the University of Leeds. In the article, I draw on the now widely-held observation that in Australian colonialist ideology the city has long represented historical time and progress while the desert represented timelessness and essentialist Aboriginality. I suggest that *fluent* moved beyond this restrictive paradigm to produce new ways of rethinking the city, making a political intervention into Venice as a major centre of the global art world, but also prompting transformative encounters on an affective level that were culturally-grounded, imbuing Venice as an urban space with Indigenous meanings. I argue that this analysis is timely because there are so few instances in the discourse on Aboriginal art and exhibitions since the late 1990s where *fluent* is credited as a uniquely important exhibition. This is not to appropriate the exhibition's intervention as my own, I hope, but to contribute

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[688] Horsfield.

to a shift in the discourse that once again can recognise the exhibition's effects, in addition to the vital interventions by the curators and artists.

Despite the most recent voices in the literature, which have arguably underemphasised *fluent*'s capacity to make effects and prompt transformative encounters with artworks for potentially thousands of people; ethicality is demonstrable in the exhibition and over the span of Croft's career. As her curatorial practice has developed since the 1980s, Croft has designed and implemented strategic interventions that have consistently challenged the dominant order of representation. In a long view, Croft's practice reveals a sense of ongoing responsibility to counteract marginalisation and repression, and set up more productive spaces for sensitive and transformative encounters with artwork made by those who have traditionally experienced marginalisation and oppression. In *fluent* this sense of responsibility took conceptual and creative form through attention to relationality while maintaining cultural specificity. Relationality in turn can be read in the exhibition's sites as having ethicising effects, from the focus on Judy Watson's interest in water as something that connects us all, to the highlighting of the vitality of Yvonne Koolmatrie's weaving, which the artist learned could heal broken spirits and engender moral understanding and reasoning.

In the next chapter I consider the fuller meaning of Indigenous women's participation in Venice, the international stage of the art world, and then examine in more depth the relative absence of *fluent* and associated critical Indigenous curatorial practices in the more recent literature before considering how a concept of curatorial ethicality may contribute to a renewed capacity for *fluent* to take effect.

Chapter Six. *fluent* as intervention and instance of *curare manqué*

Having presented an account of the practice of Brenda L Croft and *fluent* in Chapter Five, noting especially the configuration of responsibilities and forms in which care emerged in practice, in the first part of this chapter I map out in more depth the cultural field in which the exhibition emerged and intervened, asking what it meant for Aboriginal women artists to exhibit in Venice.

In manner similar to Part One, Chapter Four, where I considered the significance of de Zegher's practice in *Inside the Visible* as an instance of ethical practice from which to read, learn and work, in the second part of this chapter I consider the relative absence of sustained analyses of *fluent* in the authorised narrative of contemporary Aboriginal art in art historical discourse. There seems to be a distinct denial of *fluent* and its curatorial intervention. I then read a more politicised discursive site and ask how structural exclusion may be conceptualised in the *writing* of histories of contemporary Aboriginal cultural practice, exposing the silences and gaps on *fluent* not as incidental but as potentially repressive with destructive effects. I propose that these silences and gaps furthermore prevent *fluent* and Croft's practice (among others) from taking place in collective memory, negating potential cultural and political effects which would take place in a deeper, structural capacity, and disallowing its creative and imaginative resolutions to inflect current knowledge formations. In this sense, I suggest *fluent* is vulnerable to becoming an instance of *curare manqué,* meaning 'that [which] might have been but is not, that [which] has missed being.'[689] With a shift in discursive terms that acknowledge the possibility and productivity of a politicised ethic of care, however, *fluent* could once more be accessed as a resource and instance of ethicality from which to read, learn and work, in the present and the future.

The exhibition in the field of contemporary art

The purpose of this section is to position *fluent* within the field of contemporary art in Australia and internationally, seeing as the exhibition was partly conceived in response to the difficulty faced by advocates of Aboriginal art in securing recognition and support from the wider contemporary art world. First I argue that *fluent*'s statement of contemporaneity needs to be seen in light of the 'biennalisation' of contemporary art, that is, the total transformation of the art world in the era of accelerated capitalism.[690] The economic processes of biennalisation, and the intersection of global and local at the Venice Biennale more specifically, curbed the particular formation of the curatorial in the context of *fluent* which can be read in a number of ways.

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[689] 'Manqué, Adj.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <http://www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/113633> [accessed 6 November 2013].

[690] Again I use 'biennalisation' in the sense proposed by Anthes. Bill Anthes 'Contemporary Native Artists and International Biennial Culture', *Visual Anthropology Review*, 25 (2009), 109–127 <doi:10.1111/j.1548-7458.2009.01037.x>.

fluent and the global/local of biennalisation

Biennalisation can be understood in more depth as the rapid process by which biennales and other large-scale recurring art exhibitions have appeared in an increasing number of cities around the world, connecting local artistic practices into an accelerated global network of exchange of information and capital, to the extent that biennales are now a dominant exhibition model.[691] Venice Biennale holds a unique position within this process. As the oldest biennale, established at the threshold of twentieth century European modernisation, it pre-dates the global exhibition circuit sustained by late twentieth-century capitalism. However because the nationalist curatorial format survives, Venice Biennale has distinctive implications for the curation of its individual pavilions. Its status persists today, compounded by the demands of global capitalism, which continually centralise and reproduce the power of Venice as a primary hub in the expanding global market of contemporary art and culture.[692] *fluent*'s position is not a given however.

Leading up to 1997 these factors configured a very particular intersection of global and local with a long history that Croft, Perkins and Lynn inevitably negotiated as they designed and prepared the exhibition *fluent.* From its founding in the fifth century, Venice had been largely independent from other powers, flourishing as an increasingly innovative commercial centre with trade links in the Arabic world until a series of naval victories 'came to a climax' in 1204, when 'Venice's part in the conquest of Constantinople by Western crusaders... made Venice an imperial power.'[693] From then on, the history of the city is said to have been entwined with 'all the shifts of power in the Mediterranean.'[694] Venice survived as an independent 'city state' until the fall of the Republic of Venice in 1797 when Napoleon took power and Venice became part of Austria, and then became independent again in 1848–1849.[695] In 1866 Venice lost its independence and became absorbed into the Kingdom of Italy. Nationalism was therefore a modern phenomenon that flourished with *Risorgimento*, or unification.[696]

The Biennale was established in 1895 as a symbol of this new nationalism, when a group of Venetian intellectuals lit upon transforming the 'idea of Venice as a glorious economic and naval power into that of a modern city and centre: a new international and contemporary art market which

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[691] O'Neill, p. 53.

[692] Despite growing resistance from an increasing number of pavilions- this year's egs, and social media apps etc mapping ideologies of VB

[693] Frederic Chapin Lane, 'Venice, a Maritime Republic', 1973, p. 2 <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/shcgi/t/text/pageviewer-idx?c=acls;cc=acls;rgn=full%20text;idno=heb00964.0001.001;didno=heb00964.0001.001;node=heb00964.0001.001%3A2;view=image;seq=22;page=root;size=100> [accessed 9 November 2013].

[694] Lane, p. 2.

[695] Lane.

[696] Lane.

would undoubtedly attract "a new and distinguished type of tourism."'[697] Art historian Jane Chin Davidson links this historical imperialism with late nineteenth-century capitalism, arguing that

> The Venice Biennale began during the "age of empire" as the period of imperialism which Lenin once distinguished as having "economic roots in a specific new phase of capitalism" that led to, among other things, "the territorial division of the world among the great capitalist powers". Something like the custodial relic-ruin, the geography of the Venice Biennale still reflects the old imperialism – frozen in time as the mapping of the nineteenth-century economic supremacy of European and North American nations.[698]

The Biennale's seemingly imperialist exhibition logic, especially its format of national pavilions, for Indigenous practitioners, and even Lynn as a white Australian curator, possibly meant confronting the historical face of European power and the global reach of colonialism. This may have been the case even if Venice or the Italian empire, which colonised parts of Africa, had no specific historical connection with the British Empire in Australia. There is another way of thinking about 'Europe' as the image of imperialism, where recognising the specificities of its internal histories are less important than the project of differentiating the global north from the global south, coloniser from colonised. Indigenous anthropologist Marcia Langton has observed that Indigenous definitions of 'Europe' may include any number of nationalities who have recently arrived in Australia, and argued that it is time these definitions were heeded, especially in the light of excessive anxiety and over-determination of the meanings of Indigeneity in colonial history.[699]

Strategically, the curators did not overemphasise the disjuncture of Indigenous artists temporarily locating their practice in an historical centre of empire. In fact they barely drew attention to it, except to note that this was the first time Aboriginal women had participated in Venice Biennale. The curators did not focus on any logical disharmony between the participating artists' interests—whether telling their own stories, preserving their own cultural traditions, expressing self-determination or cultural survival in any form, even simply affirming their own existence—and the attempted obliteration of Indigenous peoples worldwide by imperial European powers historically. In *fluent* there was no curatorial gesture of antagonism, no 'fuck the Australian Pavilion' in the vein of Croft and Perkin's earlier exhibition *True Colours: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Artists Raise the Flag.*

By 1997 it was entirely possible for *fluent*'s curators and artists to inhabit Venice temporarily on different terms, and construct their own ways of relating to the city without relinquishing their identities as Indigenous, their rights as Australian citizens or anything else denied them under Australian colonialist policy until relatively recently. Moreover, the curators were able to name the

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[697] Vittoria Martini, 'A Brief History of I Giardini: Or a Brief History of the Venice Biennale Seen from the Giardini | Art & Education', trans. by Jennifer Knaeble, *Art & Education* <http://www.artandeducation.net/paper/a-brief-history-of-i-giardini-or-a-brief-history-of-the-venice-biennale-seen-from-the-giardini/> [accessed 27 January 2012].

[698] Jane Chin Davidson, 'The Global Art Fair and the Dialectical Image', *Third Text*, 24 (2010), 719–34 (p. 719) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2010.517919>.

[699] Marcia Langton, 'Aboriginal Art and Film: The Politics of Representation', *Race & Class*, 35 (1994), 89–106 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/030639689403500410>.

cross-cultural movement this meeting implicated as a fluid convergence. One recognisable instance is in the catalogue essay, where curator Perkins allowed a space for artist Judy Watson's thoughts about Venice to unfold:

> The water is a constant element, the city is desperately trying not to become an Atlantis and sink beneath the waves... The sound of the water is everywhere, especially at high tide, you can hear the waves against the buildings, licking history away.[700]

Watson observed the city actually sinking, slowly but in real time, making for a poignant moment in the catalogue whereby a monumental loss was marked; a beautiful city slowly sinking. But further still, Watson voiced something profound about the demise of Venice. Without intoning a triumphalist narrative, the artist and by extension the curators produced a conceptual space, a possibility, for inhabiting a new position in relation to the city. The decay of Venice and its survival against constant pressures is not a new revelation: the city's decline has long been a major question for Venetians and visitors alike. Historians Robert Davis and Garry Marvin have suggested,

> One question... for more than a century has uniquely shadowed this Most Romantic of Cities: is Venice dying? Some have claimed that it most definitely is not, backing this up with such delightfully specious logic as "A city that gives people ideas is not a dead city" (Angkor Wat? Machu Picchu? Atlantis?) Others say that Venice is not only dying but is already dead, killed by its tourist monoculture, pollution, and the inexorably rising tides. Historically, we know that Venice repeatedly has been declared comatose, if not quite deceased: on the ropes, breathing its last, sliding from view beneath the waves. Yet the city, to the extent that it is a city, has kept on, albeit with levels of tourists, rates of physical collapse, and heights of tides that would have been considered horrific there just a couple of decades ago.[701]

The specific processes of modernisation that have threatened Venice, and the costs of participating in global capitalism to survive, perhaps echo the precarious conditions that Indigenous people have had to negotiate since first contact. Australia formally separated from Britain not long after Italy's *Risorgimento,* federating in 1901 to form the Commonwealth of Australia, and subsequently embracing a new nationalism and programme of modernisation that had destructive effects on Indigenous peoples.[702] In this light, Watson's comment could be seen within a wider curatorial act of care that establishes an ethical attitude of openness and recognition to the city, particularly its struggles to resist oppression (by other political powers), submergence (by rising water, compounded by climate change) and destruction (for example, by pollution and the demands of unsustainable levels of tourism). The submergence of the city may be considered as being 'Indigenised' by Judy Watson and the curators. That is, the city is recast in an Indigenous/Waanyi light that shifts the balance of power and the relationship to Venice. The demise of the city is represented not through celebratory triumphalism, but by arousing poignancy, and by producing

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[700] Perkins, 'Fluent', p. 13.

[701] Robert C. (Robert Charles) Davis and Garry Marvin, 'Venice, the Tourist Maze: A Cultural Critique of the World's Most Touristed City', 2005, p. 6 <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/shcgi/t/text/text-idx?c=acls;idno=heb90030.0001.001;rgn=div2;view=text;cc=acls;node=heb90030.0001.001%3A7.2> [accessed 9 November 2013].

[702] In the form of state-enforced assimilation and destruction of Indigenous cultures, see again 'To Remove and Protect: Laws That Changed Aboriginal Lives: Legislations'.

affinities with Judy Watson's own cultural memory which she has written 'soaks into the ground.' In this sense, the curators could be understood to work relationally, by producing active relations with the city as another subject or partial-subject with whom or which they co-affect, rather than a passive container for the establishment of their own subjectivity.

fluent's curators also encountered Venice Biennale as a contemporary economic power. The Biennale's influential position in the global art world presented a set of political risks for *fluent*'s curators, caring as they were for Indigenous women artists with relatively little exposure on the worldwide stage, and therefore few precedents in terms of curatorial strategies to meet multiple responsibilities and needs. Aside from the struggles to exhibit in the arena of contemporary art in the first place, the political risks of actually participating in Venice Biennale are not immediately visible, however, in the archive, however. In fact, Brenda Croft distanced *fluent* from politics generally in my interview with her. She maintains that the co-curators 'were deliberately being political with *True Colours*, but with *fluent* made sure it was all about the work being seen as international contemporary art, and not couched in politics.'[703] As readers of Croft's comment, we might pause to make a distinction. On the one hand, 'politics' stands for the political arena of governance, and in this sense exhibitions are couched in politics where they imply commenting directly on government policy or institutional processes by making a stance on a political issue very clear. Croft's comment can be read in this sense, that the activist politics of *True Colours* hit hard on the misrepresentation of Aboriginal people and Australian histories in the cultural imaginary, whereas *fluent* focussed more on the artworks' materiality and cultural specificity, opening up an aesthetic space for the consideration and experience of works as art. In another sense, the politics of an exhibition can be understood as referring to the way knowledge is organised and mediated both within the exhibition itself and between the exhibition and the wider cultural and societal fields, and how these formations relate to structures of power; economic, institutional, the psycho-symbolic order and so on. In this sense exhibitions implicate the political to some extent, whether their curators emphasise politics or not.

In the light of this, by making a claim for the contemporaneity of art by Aboriginal women, *fluent* automatically engaged with the cultural politics of representation. This engagement did not only unfurl, however, in the abstract curatorial and art historical narratives proposed by the exhibition, although we read back through the archive and try to imagine what happened based on the evidence, as opposed to living through it. The engagement with cultural politics took place in real time and had unknown consequences for the curators: could a curatorial framework be developed that would make sense to global audiences, without compromising the various cultural sensitivities that working with Indigenous artists and artwork necessitates?

The politics of Indigenous participation in biennales are addressed in the literature on large-scale exhibitions, where the local is understood to intersect the global in a particular way. This gives an insight into what it meant for the co-curators and artists to arrive in Venice and present their

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[703] Croft, 'Interview'.

material. Writing in the related North American context, art historian Bill Anthes tracks the debates surrounding the new visibility of Native artists in the global exhibition circuit in his article 'Contemporary Native Artists and International Biennial Culture' (2009).[704] Anthes establishes that some public figures in the global south see the benefits of a globalised art world for non-Western artists, for example curator Olu Oguibe who lauds the emergence of 'an environment in which contemporary artists from around the world may aspire to visibility.'[705] Similarly, curator Carlos Basulado has linked global exhibition culture to 'a salutary politics of liberation and empowerment. "The global expansion of large-scale exhibitions [...] performs an insistent de-centering of both the canon and artistic modernity."'[706] These are certainly the terms in which *fluent*'s curators took the selected artists to Venice: to compel the visibility of Aboriginal women where before there had been absence, both at Venice and in the officially-sanctioned narratives of Australian art history. Here again I would highlight the consistency and compatibility of Indigenous participation in the contemporary art world as *fluent*'s main curatorial rationale.

While accurate in a broad sense, Oguibe and Basualdo paint an ideal picture, whereas the reality of Indigenous participation in Venice is more complex. Anthes considers art historian Miwon Kwon's assertion that in the global age of the transnational curator and artist, the logic of nomadism—artists and curators constantly travelling to biennales all over the world— erodes 'the distinction between home and elsewhere,' decentring the constitution of the self.[707] The question is then, what is the impact on the stability of cultural identity of Indigenous artists? And for my purposes, curators who want to represent Indigeneity in some way? Anthes refers to curator Gerald McMaster, who in 1999 asked this question about '[A]boriginal people [who] struggle to reclaim land and hold onto their present land.'[708] In the article, Anthes inquires into the compatibility of Native identity and global visibility, asking whether the two are mutually exclusive or beneficial.

One major point in Anthes complicates the logic of translation and affinity between the global and local, which we see at play in *fluent.* Citing art historian Charlotte Townsend-Gault, Anthes addresses the tendency for some Native artists to resist 'non-Native demands for translation of Native cultural meanings and practices' in response to audiences who misinterpret Native contemporary

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[704] While Anthes' spotlight is on North American /Canadian Indigenous artists, implicates a different cultural context, arguably the arising issues are similar for Australian Indigenous artists and curators. There is a temporal dislocation however, as the Australian Pavilion paved the way with *fluent* sixteen years and counting before the United States Pavilion would be represented by Native artists. Canada was represented by Native artist Poitras in 1995 however, and Rebecca Belmore in 2005. (Anthes p.115)

[705] Olu Oguibe, 'Finding a Place: Nigerian Artists in the Contemporary Art World', *Art Journal*, 58 (1999), 31–41 (p. 32).

[706] Carlos Basualdo, 'The Unstable Institution', *Manifesta Journal*, 2 (2003), 50–61 (p. 57).

[707] Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2002), p. 157.

[708] Gerald McMaster, 'Towards an Aboriginal Art History', in *Native American Art in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by W Jackson Rushing III (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 81–96 (p. 85).

practice as 'identity-politics-art to which audiences have become over-habituated.'[709] *fluent* used the exact opposite strategy, of emphasising the translatability and fluency of Indigenous practices, to produce the same result, that is to complicate the common misunderstanding that Indigenous art manifests in one single way which might be named 'authentic.' At the same time however, although fluent by name, it is entirely probable that *fluent* concealed culturally-specific stories, memories and so on, as much as it revealed others, or versions, to global audiences. *fluent* very strongly makes the case for the strength and survival of Indigenous cultural forms, but it does not claim to present each Indigenous culture in its entirety. Inevitably aspects would have been kept secret, or regarded as too complex to deal with in one exhibition.[710] Likewise the curators cannot anticipate every single possible language or cultural system to translate the selected artists' practice *into;* and there is no totalising homogenous global monoculture to facilitate consistent fluency, although the global exhibition circuit does have its centralising forces and dominant faces. It seems more likely that the *fluent* curators were aware that global audiences bring their own ways of reading and accessing works, although the biennale institution always works on the artworks and audiences as well.

This brings us back to the question of how the Venice Biennale deals with the cultural specificity of Native artistic practices. Anthes overrides Townsend-Gault's point about Indigenous artistic 'strategies of cultural protectionism' on the grounds that these have been a part of Native practice since the 1980s. The newer direction, he argues, is for Native artists at biennales to 'invoke the experiences of Native peoples as global travelers, the political economy of Venice, global histories of colonialism and imperialism, and ... the global practices of contemporary art.'[711] Anthes does not diminish the significance of Native identity or connections to land or locale, but aims to affirm their global 'currency.' This is my term to read Anthes' point, which tries to capture his evocation of the savviness of contemporary Indigenous artists climbing the ranks of the global art world, and also the 'nowness' of Aboriginal practices as opposed to their 'primitivism.'

I would argue that both Townsend-Gault and Anthes' arguments are relevant to *fluent* and Indigenous participation in the Venice Biennale in 1997. The exhibition's configuration of contemporaneity conveyed the finesse of Indigenous artists' work and affirmed their place in the international art world, and at the same time attempted to shift the fixity of the category 'contemporary' by showing its Indigenous meanings and specificity in each selected artist's practice, building up a picture of Indigeneity not as 'authentic' but as grounded, with cultural integrity.

The line between affirming cultural identity and producing a commodifiable image of exoticised Indigeneity seemed to be a thin one for one critic. Critic John McDonald noted the

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[709] Charlotte Townsend-Gault, 'Rebecca Belmore and James Luna on Location at Venice: The Allegorical Indian Redux', *Art History*, 29 (2006), 721–+ (p. 751) <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8365.2006.00521.x>.

[710] For a discussion of the radical unknowability and untranslatability of Aboriginal art for white viewers, see Alison Ravenscroft, *The Postcolonial Eye: White Australian Desire and the Visual Field of Race* (Ashgate, 2012).

[711] Anthes, p. 118.

exhibition's 'slick' corporate branding and 'silly title.'[712] Croft's reflection that the exhibition involved extensive branding could be read as complicity with the promotional logic of the Biennale industry, or alternatively it could be read as a significant opportunity for visibility:

> An integral component of *fluent* was 'The Look': the brochures, catalogue (awarded the 1997 best design award by Museums Australia), posters, promotional banners flying from the pavilion, and particularly the red "show bags" containing the press kits, comprising catalogue, kit and slides. These bags acted as signposts not only in the Biennale grounds, but throughout Venice, and many were also sighted at Documenta X in Kassell, and Munster Sculpture Project 1997, both in Germany. Quite a number continued to catch one's eye, months after the last one had been handed out. Three of the banners, with a detail of Kngwarreye's untitled/*awelye* triptych, proved so popular that they were stolen off the pavilion one Saturday night – no mean feat, as removing the lone remaining Kngwarreye banner took quite some effort from three people.[713]

I acknowledge a key argument in contemporary art discourse in my forthcoming article '*fluent* in Venice: Contemporary Aboriginal art beyond the 'urban/desert' paradigm' (2014) that the art market and the biennale system completely transform art into commodities and nothing more.[714] While this suggests an important critique of capitalism, the problem is that it does not allow for cultural difference. If cultural difference, in this case the crucial mechanism which preserves Indigenous specificity in the face of assimilation, is not permitted into the debate as something that resists or exceeds commoditisation, then Indigeneity is subjected to destruction in contemporary culture. This is not just because capitalism is destructive and Adorno and others are simply drawing attention to its deadly process through their theorisations, but because the ideology of the anti-capitalist argument re-enacts the colonialist ideology of the inevitability of Indigenous culture dying. Croft and Perkins as co-curators seemed therefore not to 'sell-out' by embracing the commercial opportunities of Venice Biennale, but to use these measures to proudly convey positive visibility, identity and presence for Indigenous women artists on the international art world's foremost stage for the first time ever.

In practical terms, access to the international art circuit provides cultural as well as financial sustenance for artists and curators. Sociologist Olav Velthuis calls the collective impact of participation in the Venice Biennale 'the Venice effect.' He argues,

> Showing in Venice speeds up sales, gets artistic careers going, cranks up price levels and helps artists land a dealer ranked higher in the market's hierarchy. While business may be conducted

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[712] McDonald, 'Hidden Shallows', p. n.pag.

[713] Brenda L Croft, 'Where Ancient Waterways and Dreams Intertwine', *Periphery*, 1998, 9–13 (p. 10-11). Likewise, Croft commented that one component of Judy Watson's work was also stolen. She wrote, 'frustrating though this was at the time, in the end we chose to consider the thefts as a form of "flattery", in that people liked the exhibition so much they just had to take something with them.'

[714] The organisers of the Athens Biennial (2006) drew on Adorno's notion of the culture industry to argue that biennales play a role in the 'top-down' administering of culture. See 'The Athens Biennial', *Athens Biennial*, 2006 <http://www.athensbiennial.org/pages/main_en.php>; Theodor Adorno, 'The Culture Industry Reconsidered', in *The Culture Industry: selected essays on mass culture*, ed. by J M Bernstein (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp. 98–106.

in a more circumspect way than at an art fair or in a commercial gallery, and money may not be changing hands in the Arsenale or the Giardini, the market is never asleep.[715]

The Venice Biennale arguably represents for all artists a chance to access these economic resources for survival. While some artists and curators perhaps do not participate because they see the costs as too exploitative or compromising, for Croft and the other curators and artists of *fluent* the benefits seemed to outweigh the potential costs. However it is important to read *fluent* as presenting Indigenous culture and art in a complex way, not as the 'authentic' sign of a timeless, unchanging people or as an exotic postcard version of Indigeneity, but as relational in the sense of exhibiting the agency and adaptability to move across categories and destabilise their fixity and authority, and imbue the space of the Biennale with Indigenous meanings.

This kind of curatorial sensitivity and responsiveness to the relationality of the women artists' practices and specific cultures can be understood as ethical, as an ethical gesture or as a sense of ethical responsibility. Rather than present the many possible disjunctures and conflicting priorities as the main curatorial problematic of the exhibition, the curators enacted a more performative resolution to many of the tensions of the meeting of global and local, which can be read as an instance of curatorial care for Indigenous women's participation in Venice Biennale.

Aboriginal art as contemporary art

Having considered *fluent* in a globalised contemporaneous context, in this section I shall examine its position within and in relation to more recent Australian culture and discourse. The discursive field of contemporary art in Australia is crowded, with many voices contributing to the shift in Aboriginal art's becoming widely-understood as contemporary art. [716]

A few commentators have attempted a historical overview of the shift, simultaneously offering different means to make sense of it, but also inadvertently registering the efficacy of certain forms of curatorial practice. These texts themselves demonstrate different configurations of ethicality, and different levels of openness to ways of thinking about Aboriginal art.[717] Accordingly, I shall read through one prominent historical overview in this section, *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art* (2011) by Ian McLean, in order to closely examine how certain practices come to

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[715] Olav Velthuis, 'The Venice Effect', *The Art Newspaper*, 2011, Web only (p. n.pag).

[716] See for example, Fred Myers, *Painting Culture: The Making of Aboriginal High Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Howard Morphy, *Becoming Art: Exploring Cross-Cultural Categories* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2008); Susan Lowish, 'Writing/righting a History of Australian Aboriginal Art', *Humanities Research*, XV (2009), 133–51; Perkins, *Art + Soul*; Ian McLean, ed., *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, Australian Studies in Art and Art Theory (Sydney: Power Publications, 2011).

[717] Art historian Susan Lowish, for example, disregards what she terms 'the new art history' for discussions of Aboriginal art: 'while the debates between "old" and "new" art history and the introduction of studies of visual culture might contribute to an understanding of the shortcomings and potentialities of the field, they do not constitute an adequate platform from which it is possible to delve into the past while maintaining a perspective firmly focused on the future potential of writing about Aboriginal art.' Lowish, p. 147.

be remembered, if at all. I shall consider why *fluent*'s challenges and proposals have not yet developed into a widely-acknowledged legacy or a recognisable place in 'the story' of contemporary Aboriginal art. I then offer a close reading of a different account of contemporary Aboriginal art, *Aboriginal Art: Creativity and Assimilation* (2008) by Donna Leslie. Reading across key sites of very recent discourse, and tracking discursive formations and relative omissions, helps me to articulate the space for the ethical that has been structurally unattainable in the most comprehensive and visible historical narrative.

The authorised narrative

The most visible commentary on the discursive shift towards the wide acceptance of the contemporaneity of Aboriginal art is the landmark publication *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art,* published in 2011 by Power Publications and the Institute of Modern Art, with the assistance of the Australia Council for the Arts, the Getty Foundation, and the Nelson Meers Foundation. The volume is edited solely by Ian McLean, currently Research Professor of Contemporary Art at the University of Western Australia and the University of Wollongong. Hetti Perkins was involved in the earlier stages as co-editor before she withdrew due to work pressures. McLean is a white art historian who has established himself as a high profile commentator on Aboriginal art through his academic research; around the time of *fluent* he authored the texts *The Art of Gordon Bennett* (1996) and *White Aborigines* (1998). He also works in an editorial capacity for *Third Text*.

How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art is an ambitious publication; in 360 pages McLean presents material sourced from art journals, newspapers, exhibition catalogues and books, from 1945-2006, with an emphasis on 1980 onwards, after which time he recounts how curators, art critics and other art world voices joined anthropologists in the growing acceptance of Aboriginal art as an object of art historical interest and as a sign of the contemporary. The volume's seven major sections are 'What the anthology does,' which is effectively a preface, and 'Aboriginal art and the artworld', the introduction. The next major section 'Becoming modern' is broken down into three further sections which thematise archival and documentary material: 'Prophets', 'Apostles' and 'What is Aboriginal Contemporary Art?' The following major section is broken down geographically into 'Arnhem Land', 'Western Desert', 'Urban Australia', 'The Australian Artworld' and 'Abroad.' The next major section 'Issues' is broken down into 'Gender', 'Ethics', 'Modernism', 'Aesthetics', 'Appropriation', 'Commerce' and 'Politics.' The final major section 'How Aborigines invented the idea of contemporary art' is effectively a conclusion, and three maps of Australia with increasing detail of key locations precedes the index.

McLean's main argument is that from being regarded as 'primitive,' the domain of the ethnographic museum, Aboriginal art has rapidly become understood as contemporary art in Australia, and increasingly, internationally. In the process, McLean argues, Aboriginal art has shifted colonialist Australian thinking in which '"the Aborigine" has conventionally occupied an impossible

void', that of the Other, towards a 'new way of conceiving and living with difference that is the matrix of today's globalised world.'[718] For McLean, this has been the case since the Australian Bicentenary in 1988, by which time postmodernism had transformed the Australian artworld. Overall this transition was rapid and unexpected for (mostly white or European) art historians; however McLean notes some historical precedents which I shall briefly recount here.

At one point in the early twentieth century, select white Australian artists had been fascinated by some forms of Aboriginal art particularly on formalist aesthetic grounds, for example Tony Tuckson and Margaret Preston. They enthusiastically embraced these forms in the spirit of a new Australian national consciousness, as distinct from the British Empire. McLean asserts however that no convergence was envisaged, and that the hierarchical modernist trope of civilised/primitive was the dominant model of any cross-cultural activity.[719] Later on, from mid-century onwards, cross-cultural friendships and professional relationships opened up lines of communication, and enabled Aboriginal artists and communities to gain a degree of recognition from select artworld figures. At this time, white anthropologists were also working closely with Aboriginal communities to understand their symbolic and ceremonial practices, which included the creation/production of art, although I would add this does not necessarily mean that art was assumed by anthropologists to be a universal category with trans-cultural applicability. Key anthropologists, for McLean, 'especially those who enjoy close working relationships with individual artists, continue to provide the most informed and closest reading of the aesthetic achievements of Aboriginal art.'[720] Anthropologists have produced some important exhibitions of Aboriginal art that have contributed to the art historical archive, but McLean shows that art historical interest in the aesthetics of Aboriginal artistic practice did not come until wider cultural shifts had taken place.

McLean documents the changing political field in Australia from the perspective of its impact on the art world, noting the changes in institutional structures and cultural policy following the 1960s. I would add to this disciplinary-focussed art historical narrative that key socio-political events, from the 1967 Referendum and the Gurindji strike which heralded the ongoing struggle for land rights, to global events of 1968 and the civil rights movement, actively contributed to the production of historical agency possible for Aboriginal people.

In 1972, Gough Whitlam's election as Prime Minister began a new era of support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and the arts and culture. McLean tracks the institutional changes that followed new developments in cultural policy, which resulted in increasing Aboriginal input into funding structures and institutional processes.[721] Aboriginal people pushed to join the professional ranks of the 'artworld', and eventually succeeded, opening up a new critical space for Aboriginal art.

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[718] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', pp. 68–9.
[719] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 27.
[720] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 58.
[721] For example in the form of the Aboriginal Arts Board.

After the sacking of the Whitlam Government, in 1975, the late 1970s and early 1980s was a time of uncertainty, with white Australian curators and critics embracing Aboriginal art in a number of experimental ways with various ideological implications for Aboriginal art. By the end of the 1980s, several major visual arts exhibitions/displays in Australia and overseas had featured Aboriginal art as unequivocally contemporary. McLean argues that these can be understood, to some extent, as part of the strong reaction against the major exhibition '*Primitivism' in 20th Century Art* (MOMA, 1984), which was criticised for reproducing primitivist modes of looking.

McLean takes a particular turn at this point, focussing the trajectory of his narrative on one main factor: the inception of postmodernism in 'mainstream' Australian art history, alongside the newly elevated position of Aboriginal voices in the artworld, and increasing (but not consistent) institutional support for Aboriginal art. For McLean, postmodern theory characterises how the field of art history first seriously countenanced Aboriginal art as contemporary art. Postmodernism, as articulated in multiple sites, enabled investigation into the relations between Aboriginal art and central art historical tenets.[722] McLean's primary example is the relationship between Western Desert acrylic painting and abstraction as debated in formalist modernism, which represents the first real attempt by the Australian art world to engage with Aboriginal art without defaulting to the primitivist trope of Eurocentric modernism. Rather than in mainstream sites, Papunya painting for example emerged into the artworld in specialist art periodicals that dealt with conceptual art, the construction of identities, and the cultural pastiche of settler societies, following a period of scepticism.[723]

McLean discusses the implications of the concept of the 'Aboriginality' of Aboriginal art practices in art historical discourse. Aboriginal art was under discussion as an aesthetic object in postmodernist art history by the end of the 1980s, rather than an object symbolic of a 'pure', 'authentic' Aboriginal culture. This shift paralleled the growing postmodern suspicion of claims of authenticity. Aboriginal art was being seen less as pertaining to a single cultural sphere, but at the same time it was increasingly acknowledged as a 'hybrid' artform, or 'parody' of 'its own culture' in the words of white Australian artist Tim Johnson.[724] McLean observes,

> Aboriginal art had become a contemporary theoretical object, and one exemplary of the postmodern condition. This is not to say that there was no artworld opposition to this development. However, the opposition was primarily political: it was not aimed at Aboriginal art's aesthetic credentials but at the artworld's motives, and followed a wider postcolonial critique of postmodernism.'[725]

McLean paints a complex picture, showing how some commentators have voiced concerns that Aboriginal art has been subject to cultural colonialism by the art world's demands. He also counters this, arguing that the postmodern condition is as ubiquitous in remote Aboriginal communities as

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[722] McLean cites the journals *Artlink, Art Network, Art & Text* and *Praxis M*
[723] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', pp. 50–51.
[724] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 53.
[725] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 54.

much as anywhere else. McLean cites white art historian Rex Butler on the influence of Emily Kame Kngwarreye, whose work was featured in *fluent,*

> A whole series of 'tribal' Aboriginal artists have since fallen under the spell of the look and style of her art, which broke away from the laborious dotting and encrypted iconography that dominated their practice until then... It will lead to a kind of 'post-Aboriginal' art in the same way we now speak of 'post-Impressionist' art... an attempt to fuse Aboriginal and Western art, so that almost nothing of what we call 'traditional' Aboriginal art remains? Is Aboriginal art–not art made by Aboriginal people, but any identifiable style of Aboriginal art–coming to an end?[726]

I would respond that the idea that Aboriginal art was ever a single identifiable 'style' is at odds with the multiplicity of Aboriginal artistic practices coming into visibility in the 1980s and 1990s, but most importantly neutralises the ideological layers at play in terms such as 'tribal' and 'traditional' Aboriginal art. These signifiers and categories have been contested by Croft and many others since the 1980s.

McLean's argument next turns to Aboriginal voices in the art world. He makes several important points that problematise the polarisation of anthropological versus aesthetic frameworks in the discourse. Firstly, anthropologists have often listened to Aboriginal artists closely and helped give their work a voice ahead of white art historians. Secondly, the professionalisation of Aboriginal positions in the arts has been largely due to the interventionist policy of the AAB. For example, the establishment of remote art centres has enabled Aboriginal agency. Thirdly, a 'new' critical approach emerged 'on the back of postmodernism.' This 'cultural studies/postcolonial approach,' 'in many respects ... richer than the conventional artworld focus on aesthetic discourse and individual genius,' emphasises for McLean multiple discourses and has enriched anthropology and disciplinary art history.[727]

McLean also considers 'the most significant milestone in the artworld itself... the direct contribution of Indigenous critics,' citing Brenda L Croft.[728] He suggests several reasons why Aboriginal critics and curators gained influence. There was 'a genuine desire in the artworld for authentic [sic] Aboriginal voices,' the result of an emerging postcolonial theory that began to challenge the Eurocentric bias of postmodernism.[729] I would argue that such a genuine desire for Aboriginal people's own voices and self-representation is visible in the Australia Council's Brief for Representation where it called for Aboriginal women artists to represent Australia in 1997.The

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[726] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 55.

[727] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 60.

[728] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 60.

[729] We might read McLean's use of 'authentic' to mean Aboriginal people's own voices, rather than the 'desire for authenticity' as the nostalgic pining for essentialist notions of Aboriginal people, for example the 'noble savage'.

Council was accused of political correctness, and was undoubtedly motivated by other institutional and political agendas as well. In a reparative light, however, the hand was extended.[730]

For McLean, the 1990s art world was no longer characterised by avant-gardist but subaltern histories.[731] This art historical condition dovetailed with the active drive by Aboriginal practitioners to 'Indigenise the artworld and promote Aboriginal perspectives.'[732] McLean argues, 'Indigenous populations were not passive victims or bemused spectators of the artworld's longing for their art and having agitated for so long, seised [sic] the opportunity. They had something to say, and felt an urgency to get it out.'[733] The verb 'Indigenise' signifies a paradigm shift from dominating colonialist frameworks to Indigenous perspectives on Indigeneity. McLean's primary example of the critical and Aboriginal reclamation of Aboriginal contemporary art from abstracting postmodernist art historical theory is the exhibition *Emily Kame Kngwarreye: Alhalkere: Paintings from Utopia* (1998) curated by Margo Neale. In the catalogue, Neale challenged the white European art historical patrilineage attributed to Kngwarreye, whose art actually 'forces the parameters of contemporary art discourse and renders Western terms of reference largely inadequate.'[734] *fluent* is not mentioned at all in McLean's entire publication, but the example of *Alhalkere* on the surface perhaps offers a similar angle on Aboriginal art as contemporary art. That is, contemporary art is an inhabitable category for work made by an artist who lived her entire life very close to the way her forebears lived prior to contact.

At this point, McLean discusses the theoretical and political move by some Aboriginal artists and critics beyond an essentialist notion of Aboriginal identity, and a wide 'impatience' with identity politics in the 1990s. He quotes Marcia Langton; 'Aboriginality only has meaning when understood in terms of intersubjectivity, when both the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal are subjects not objects.'[735] McLean here makes a very valuable point, that essentialist notions of Aboriginality are generally more problematic than they are useful. However Langton, according to McLean, has also worked to show that 'the authenticity of the artists' spiritual practices must be taken seriously,' and in fact that it

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[730] Again here I make reference to Sedgwick's formulation of paranoic versus reparative reading, where paranoic reading suggests an overly-programmatic approach that is fixated on uncovering true meaning through critique, as distinct from reparative reading which aims to re-open other methodological possibilities which are focussed on contingent and local relations between knowledge and its epistemological entailments for the knower/teller. Sedgwick, pp. 123–152.

[731] 'Subaltern' makes reference to subaltern studies, a field of literary and cultural criticism. See the series Subaltern Studies: Writings on Indian History and Society, published and edited since 1982 by a group of historians working on India, see Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Subaltern Studies and Postcolonial Historiography', in *Handbook of Historical Sociology* (London: Sage Publications, Ltd, 2003), pp. 191–205; In 1988 Gayatri Spivak furthered her analysis of the silenced subject of the colonised woman in the archive, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313.

[732] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 61.

[733] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 61.

[734] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 61.

[735] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 61.

should form the ethical basis between 'Aborigines and the wider Australian world.'[736] Langton's analysis resonates strongly with the ethical basis I have been attempting to track in *fluent* and also the research ethics literature for conducting research with Indigenous participants.[737]

As McLean draws his introduction to a close, he asserts that the place of Aboriginal art in the 'artworld' is now secure. Furthermore, he argues, its 'primary historical function' is to show the settler audience, caught between old and new lands, 'a way to belong to this place rather than another.' He briefly investigates some major art historical texts from the Northern Hemisphere, and finds that globally this trajectory is yet to be fulfilled. Despite some 'contemporary Europeans' who understand postcolonial imperatives, for example Jean Fisher, many non-Australian art historical accounts of contemporary art lag behind Australian art historical writing in the representation of Aboriginal art.

McLean tracks a paradoxical outcome: historically Aboriginal art was designated a cipher of the remote past, and a sign of the 'otherness' of the 'tribal' and 'primitive' by the paradigm of modernism. In the late twentieth century it became central to the field of contemporary art in Australia, via postmodernism's disruption of the modernist paradigm, and via postcolonialism's demystification of othering processes. For McLean it became the foremost form of Australian contemporary art: because the art of 'settlers' is always caught in catch-up games with Europe or New York, it is condemned to secondary status, both in relation to the global North, and to that which 'belongs' and stems from the continent of Australia. McLean analyses the way the art world has adopted Aboriginal art, which it historically could not acknowledge as art or as Australian. The ways Aboriginal art has been represented, McLean argues, have been open to interpretation by both postmodernists who pursue the trajectory of hybridity and 'post-Aboriginality,' and postcolonial critics who are more focussed on what he terms 'authenticity,' which might be more accurately read as 'specificity' and 'locality.' He also recognises the space cleared by Aboriginal artists and curators for self-representation.

The architecture of this argument does make sense of certain observable phenomena in operation as attitudes towards Aboriginal art shifted in the second half of the twentieth century. But in fact the effect of the text is to marginalise practices when they do not conform to its narrative. This effect is subtle, and even ironic given McLean's stated openness to multiple discourses and perspectives.

The exclusion of Aboriginal critical voices occurs not necessarily within the historical field being surveyed, but at the level of the authorial position from which the field is read and interpreted. McLean does establish his intention to incorporate multiple voices into his compilation, which

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[736] See Langton.

[737] See for example Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

furthermore is not intended to be comprehensive. These acknowledgements could signal a respect for the limits of the author's own perspective, however there is no discussion on the relationship between authorship, power and knowledge especially in relation to official histories of Aboriginal people, so the text has the problematic effect of inscribing the authority of the author with certain implications. The key move that fails to take place is the decentring of the authorial position from which the history is constructed. Even as McLean attempts to chart a course between postmodernism and postcolonialism or 'subaltern Aboriginal histories', his own subject position is unchanged by the key subaltern/postcolonial question of whom or what is made invisible at the level of the text. When, for example, McLean speaks of the triumph of Aboriginal art, and asserts that its 'place in the artworld is now secure,' one might pose the question to which art forms he refers, and whether the security provided by the art world is consistent, satisfactory and sustainable. My aim is not to undermine McLean's significant project, because he tracks remarkably complex shifts and rightly acknowledges that their significance is not yet totally clear. My aim is rather to question the authority on which he speaks, and for whom he speaks, in order to a) establish why *fluent* is underrepresented in art history, and b) consider what an account of Aboriginal art and contemporaneity might be able to *do* if it was formulated in relation to an openness to ethicality as a politics of avoiding marginalisation and repression, producing sensitive knowledge and so on.

Brenda Croft's own review of *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art,* published in the journal *Artlink* (2012) asks who and what ceases to become part of this authorised history of Aboriginal contemporary art. Croft notes the absent voices of 'Indigenous curators from community organisations, ethnographic and fine art museums, other than the expected inclusions of Djon Mundine and Hetti Perkins.'[738] For Croft even these curators are represented sparingly. Other absences in the volume include critical discussion on artistic production in the south-west of the country; artistic collectives; the 1990 and 1997 representations from Australia at the Venice Biennale; the major Australian Indigenous Art Commission for the Musèe du quai Branly, curated by Croft and Perkins in 2006, and several other major projects and curators. Significantly, Croft observes that within the section 'Ethics', there are no Indigenous voices where there could have been several. She adds, 'women artists are given short shrift, as are the considerable contributions from notable non-Aboriginal women curators, art centre coordinators, commercial representatives and writers.'[739] Croft also notes how little attention is afforded to photography or the 'craft versus art' debate. These silences and omissions, Croft concludes, 'impact on this reader's engagement with the book – I kept hearing Perkins' quote "Margin, a white space for black people."'[740] She suggests that the absence of Hetti Perkins' editorial contribution is noticeable, although Marcia Langton provided assistance to McLean. Croft relays the frequent feeling of frustration among Aboriginal artistic communities that 'few apparent lessons [have been] learn[ed] from the experiences of those gone before – artists,

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[738] Croft, 'How Did Aborigines Invent the Idea of Contemporary Art?', p. 112.
[739] Croft, 'How Did Aborigines Invent the Idea of Contemporary Art?', p. 113.
[740] Croft, 'How Did Aborigines Invent the Idea of Contemporary Art?', p. 113.

curators, art centre co-ordinators, etc.'[741] This is in sharp distinction to McLean's argument that the place of Aboriginal art in the 'artworld' is now secure.

Croft's review shows that the logic of selection/selectiveness underpinning McLean's narrative reiterates a homogenous concept of Aboriginal art and cultural practice, even as their diversity is acknowledged nominally. I would add that the absence of a sustained engagement with critical Aboriginal discursive interventions, such as Croft's throughout her career, serves to intensify the centralisation of select practices, and the marginalisation of many that do not conform. Croft's conviction that the artworld has 'many centres, parallel and overlapping,' nullifies the basic premise at play in McLean's text that 'they' (read Aboriginal artists) joined, were received or accepted by 'us' (the art world, predominantly white but unacknowledged as such). Croft's point about 'many centres' underlines the fact that 'the artworld' has been transformed at the structural level to the point that it is no longer possible to even implicate one 'artworld' in reception of a distinct and conceptually separate Aboriginal art. The challenge remains to rethink Aboriginal artists and curators' interventions, so that they work on the story itself, and the terms in which it takes shape.

I would suggest that the stakes are as high as this— destruction and survival— and not simply semantic tussling. Here I shall turn to one other history of Aboriginal contemporary art in order to contend with the deeply-charged politics of representation, especially of Aboriginal history and experience, which extends to cultural production. This helps articulate in greater depth how a politicised ethos may be permitted into the cultural imaginary, and the violence enacted, however unknowingly, when it remain invisible and inactivated.

A relational history

In this section I aim to pull back and consider how the discursive field of Aboriginal art and the contemporary moment is more differentiated than the authorised narrative permits. I shall reflect on a different but related history of Aboriginal art that is contemporary, in the form of a publication titled *Aboriginal Art: Creativity and Assimilation,* published in 2008 by Macmillan Art Publishing with a grant from Colonial Foundation Trust. Its author is Donna Leslie, an art historian and painter belonging to the Gamilaroi people. She has written a history of Aboriginal art 'from an Aboriginal perspective,' that for me stands apart because it employs relational methodologies, and emphasises relationality as a key feature of contemporary Aboriginal artistic practice. This is a strategic move to counter art historical methodologies that are shaped by the ideology of assimilation. While Leslie does not focus on the contemporaneity of Aboriginal art per se, her writing sheds light on the political and ethical potential of relationality as offered by the curators and artists of *fluent.*

Leslie offers a critique of the different historical approaches to Aboriginal art, in particular 'the convergence of anthropological and art historical methodologies which have shaped the interpretation

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[741] Croft, 'How Did Aborigines Invent the Idea of Contemporary Art?', p. 113.

of Aboriginal art throughout much of the last two centuries.'[742] Her argument is not teleological in the sense that Aboriginal art fulfils a linear historical function by becoming known as contemporary Australian art in the late twentieth century, or that Aboriginal art is at least in part transformed from 'primitive' into contemporary in art historical writing, points both found in McLean. Leslie offers an account of Aboriginal art practice as a 'sustained collective creative voice, which reaffirms its own cultural heritage,' registering the effects of assimilation but not totally transformed by the encounter with it, or with art historical categorisation. Whereas McLean openly acknowledges his focus on social issues where they arise in writing on Aboriginal art 'and not the wider politics of race and Aboriginality,'[743] Leslie offers an 'analysis of the policy of assimilation and its relationship to the categorisation of Aboriginal art.'[744] That is, she examines the ways assimilation has structured and shaped disciplinary art history, but she also tracks alternative curatorial and art historical models that have attempted to engender more culturally astute ways of thinking which have emerged as the histories of Aboriginal art have been rewritten and artistic practices have developed. Through her case studies, Leslie makes a case for 'fresh ways of unravelling and understanding the Aboriginal experience.'[745] Leslie defines assimilation broadly as the processes used to destroy Aboriginal heritage, practices and culture,[746] which include but are not limited to the Australian Government's efforts to transform 'mixed-blood' Aboriginal Australians into white Australians in the period 1930-1970.[747]

Leslie focuses on three Aboriginal artists who worked in the twentieth century, which echoes the structure of *fluent:* not monographic or a comparison, but designed to explore the links between three artists and their different positionalities, backgrounds and experiences. Unlike *fluent,* the artists are all men, however the emphasis on the cultural and familial relations of each artist challenges the individualist construction of the artist as hero, master or star. Referring to art historian Sylvia Kleinert, Leslie makes the point that the model of the alienated and tragic artist does not adequately indicate the complexities of the cross-cultural dynamic,[748] although a focus on the individual offers potentialities as well.[749] She writes,

> The first history analyses the world of Albert Namatjira. At first, publicly presented as an ambassador for assimilation, Namatjira's career was subsequently perceived in terms of his failure to assimilate socially, despite his outstanding success in adopting the delicate medium of European watercolour. The idea that absolute assimilation was not only achievable, but also necessary, was seriously questioned after the artist's humiliating public trial in 1958.

> The work of artist Les Griggs... gives voice to the experience of enforced separation which was a consequence of assimilation and became the vehicle through which he established cultural and

[742] Donna Leslie, *Aboriginal Art: Creativity and Assimilation* (Macmillan Art Pub., 2008), p. 6.
[743] McLean, 'Aboriginal Art and the Art World', p. 13.
[744] Leslie, p. 6.
[745] Leslie, p. 6.
[746] Leslie, p. 13.
[747] Leslie, p. 11.
[748] Leslie, p. 114.
[749] Leslie, p. 115.

personal reconnection with this background. It was also an expression of resistance to assimilation.

> The successful artist Lin Onus had a heightened consciousness of the duality of tradition and his contemporary cultural context. [His works] demonstrate how conscious reconnection with traditional Aboriginal knowledge can help to deal creatively with the losses brought about by assimilation.[750]

The violence of assimilation, and the losses it brought about through separation of children from their families, communities, language and lands, are shown to condition the production of work, rather than to occur outside it within the larger field of politics or race, periodically surfacing in the work as 'issues'. Reconnection and rediscovering cultural and personal relations are shown as effective means by which the artists have countered and resisted assimilation and its impact.

Leslie reveals the efficacy of developing relational art historical methodologies as well, because assimilation is at work in the way art history has been written, conditioning the structures and systems of art history that deal with Aboriginal art. In her text, Leslie reflects on historically popular categorisations of Aboriginal art, most notably 'traditional' and 'urban.' As I have explored in Chapter Five, many contemporary commentators now share the view that these categories are deeply problematic and steeped in a colonialist ideology where 'traditional' stands for authentic, timeless nature, and 'urban' identifies the inauthentic, the time of progress, culture and the city, where the 'primitive' is corrupted or diluted.[751] Leslie writes that this spatial and chronological split in fact 'emerges as a defining characteristic in the ways in which Aboriginal peoples were dealt with by the Australian Government historically.'[752]

> The life of the city, the so-called civilised European life, represents domestication and apparent elevation. When the early colonists arrived with the intention of civilising the natives, they assumed that deliberate law enforcement towards radically changing Aboriginal peoples was the appropriate path to follow. They believed that the European education of Aboriginal peoples was the only sensible route. The word 'urban', therefore, does not always simply represent the geographical place in which an Aboriginal artist lives...[753]

Critical developments such as these have largely taken grip in disciplinary art history and curatorial practice, evidenced for instance by *fluent* which did not reinforce the 'urban/remote' dichotomy, but instead strategically featured three artists living and working across several distinct contexts. I have argued that in this respect, *fluent* offered a real break from previous curatorial/art historical models, and showed that other more culturally attuned analyses were possible and also successful at national and international levels.

Post-1997, the 'urban/remote' paradigm does continue to persist more insidiously, even as art historians hope to employ these categorisations in a more neutral way, for example in McLean's

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[750] Leslie, p. 6.

[751] Noted for example by Djon Mundine and others, 'Aboriginal Art and Politics', 2009 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ct8uFA5JXnc&feature=youtube_gdata_player> [accessed 27 January 2012].

[752] Leslie, p. 127.

[753] Leslie, p. 128.

narrative which categorises certain practices in a section titled *Urban Australia*. In response to the continued usage of this classificatory system, Leslie suggests 'a collective abandonment of this terminology. When used in inappropriate contexts these terms imply imposed divisions that separate Aboriginal peoples from each other, symbolically destroying Aboriginal communities through the implication of language.'[754]

Looking back at the history of exhibitions and the writing of art histories on Aboriginal art, Leslie suggests that 'perhaps the disconnection of Aboriginal art from mainstream exhibitions [around 1940] also reflected unconscious outcomes of history: the collective need to forget frontier brutalities of the nineteenth century.'[755] The continuing use of urban/traditional as classifications in art historical discourse might similarly reflect unconscious needs and desires in the current moment, when anxiety about difference is managed by the deployment of a rejectionist/assimilationist structure in which *fluent* cannot figure because it does not entirely conform to the forms of Aboriginal art which have been selectively embraced. Thinking back to *Inside the Visible,* on a psycho-symbolic level this structure is phallocentric in the way it configures and inscribes self/other, same/different, present/absent, assimilation/rejection and so on. Feminine and relational formulations like those proposed by *fluent* do not register in phallocentric paradigms because they exceed its terms.[756]

The question of assimilation therefore presses not just from within artworks that expressly engage with certain political histories, but in the production of knowledge about Aboriginal art within art historical and curatorial spaces, even evidencing deeper unconscious oppositionality. Where problematics are not performatively negotiated; where geo-politics, cultural and sexual difference are not assimilable into the master narrative, however deconstructive or distanced from trouble that narrative attempts to be, assimilation reasserts itself. This results in the active destruction of Aboriginal practices, heritage and cultures, and furthermore, connections and relations between and across Aboriginal people, Country and land that are otherwise life-sustaining.

Like the absence of women in particularly repressive circumstances in the twentieth century mainstream art historical narratives (questioned and re-conceptualised in *Inside the Visible*), the selective absence of Croft and her women colleagues' work from the authorised narrative on contemporary Aboriginal art has the effect of folding their subjectivity back into invisibility, denying their agency and actively severing relations. Because collectively Croft, Perkins, and Lynn's curatorial practice in *fluent* initially made effective interventions and revealed the depth of potential curatorial ethicality, I suggest that *fluent* could be considered an instance of *curare manqué,* meaning 'that [which] might have been but is not, that [which] has missed being.'[757] That is, the process by which *fluent* has almost been written out of the history of major exhibitions in Australia's

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[754] Leslie, p. 126.

[755] Leslie, p. 31.

[756] This is not to convey psychoanalysis as a universalisable field of study, but to canvas a productive affinity.

[757] 'Manqué, Adj.'

contemporary moment amounts to a missed opportunity, where it might have been accessed as a resource to re-conceive the contours of the field of contemporary art, and the contemporaneity of work by Indigenous women artists. I suggest that a notion of curatorial ethicality, encompassing both *curators' sensitivity* to relationality and a politics of avoiding repression in artistic production, and at the same time a *sensitivity to curators'* sense of these ethical responsibilities, can revitalise the rejection/assimilationist paradigm at work in homogenising accounts of curatorial practice, exhibition histories, and contemporary Indigenous art.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have aimed to open up a space of inquiry into the significance of care for contemporary curatorial practice. The field of contemporary art in the later twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is now largely shaped by independent curatorial practice and the temporary exhibition format. Because curators are no longer necessarily based in institutions full-time with responsibility for collections, the possibilities inherent in the inscription of care in the term curator, beyond its historical roots, have more or less gone unnoticed in the rapid expansion of curatorial studies. Simultaneously, the impulse some curators feel to resist the marginalisation and repression of those who have traditionally been marginalised and repressed—whether artists from the art establishment on the grounds of cultural difference, women from participation in cultural life, or artworks and practices that have not found a place in the dominant narratives of disciplinary art history—seem to have mostly been articulated in terms of politics, or in debates interlinking aesthetics and politics. Not wanting to further contribute to the estrangement of ethics from these spheres of curatorial practice, I have aimed to reconnect the seemingly-anachronistic concept of curatorial care, and the acts, strategies and gestures that curators have shown instate effects that actively resist repression and marginalisation, and instead produce sensitive and progressive knowledge and set up transformative encounters in exhibitions. It has become increasingly clear that it is necessary to understand ethics and politics as interrelated, and furthermore as fundamentally linked to the aesthetic practices with which curators work, and the aesthetic modes they may even develop in their own practices.

The research was designed around case studies as a way of organising inquiry into the practices of individual curatorial subjects as well as key exhibitions, and the relations that enabled and sustained their emergence in the historical field. Methodologically, a combination of documentary research, conversations with the curators, and analysis of catalogue and exhibition as performative sites gathered and made sense of a volume of historical material. Primary sources, subject to inflection and hindsight, helped me to foreground practice rather than entirely pre-determined ideas and theories. This became more apparent as I put together the case studies, realising that both curators had insisted at various times that artworks, and the relations they highlight, were vulnerable to being overlooked. Historically this is recognisable with the dominance of the art historian and critic, and again more recently with the rise of the curator/*auteur* as the main source of knowledge about art. I attempted to read curatorial practice therefore as responsive to art and artistic practice, which itself may be understood as relationally-positioned. Furthermore, in the context of the rise of curatorial studies which is developing its own conventions, rather than illustrating a pre-established thesis with examples from practice, or focussing entirely on 'curator self-positioning', I attempted to focus on curatorial practice, its engagement with theory and/or politics, and its interventions and transformative effects.

This approach facilitated a wider view of the shifting line between the visibility and invisibility, and the possibility and impossibility of an ethical capacity, awareness and disposition in curatorial practice. Reading across the case studies, some themes emerged recurrently. These can be thought of as the current hubs or epicentres of discourse which both trouble and enable the notion of curatorial ethicality.

The contingency of ways of thinking about time was a key concept. Both Brenda Croft and Catherine de Zegher were aware of the limits of linear time and its centrality as the main temporality of Western cultures, including its expression in the discipline of traditional art history. De Zegher countered the dominant 'story of art's' progression of art movements and succession of artists, and instead posited relations across artistic practices in key moments of the twentieth century. By drawing on Julia Kristeva's theorisation of 'women's time,' de Zegher opened a conceptual space in which bonds between women were not necessarily biological or cultural, but emergent in correspondences between their psycho-symbolic positionings and socio-political negotiations across history. The resurgence of relational practices in the contemporary (again) enabled a recalibration of linear temporality so that these correspondences could come to light. Croft and her co-curators challenged the self-evidence of contemporary art as a category aligned ideologically with white Euro-Australian 'culture' against the 'timelessness' of Indigenous art as 'folk' art. By presenting Indigenous art in relation to Country and the Dreaming, as well as colonial history, they investigated the proximity of generations and memory to the present, and therefore re-imbued the contemporary with dimensional depth.

Despite the curators finding a depth of support for each exhibition in various ways, another theme to (re)emerge was the way in which the socio-political contexts of each case study were characterised by contradiction. *Inside the Visible* made its intervention into a field that frequently denied the significance of feminism, in the form of backlash against the perceived polemics of identity politics, a backlash which also engineered and promoted the populist argument that 'equality' had been achieved. This was strongly evidenced in contemporaneous press coverage of the exhibition. De Zegher was already aware of these anxieties about essentialism and the engagement with difference when she wrote in the catalogue that in the 1990s racism, violence and conservatism were 'on the increase everywhere.' This description may well extend to Australia at the same time, which was experiencing political transformation in the form of a new media-fuelled anxiety about Indigenous land claims. The irony of three Aboriginal women artists representing the nation at the Venice Biennale was noted contemporaneously, and also subsequently, by commentators trying to draw attention to the problematics of Australia's positive image abroad when the arena of politics and culture was drastically reducing the hard-won forms of recognition and agency of Indigenous people at the national level.

Simultaneous with these political developments, which actively denied the future of political and creative agency for people and groups traditionally subjected to marginalisation, both case study

exhibitions cleared a space for different politics, commitments and registers of knowledge to find articulation. In the case of *Inside the Visible,* de Zegher highlighted the 1990s as a key moment of conservatism and repression in the twentieth century, in relation to which women artists negotiated, intervened and challenged the dominant order in their respective practices, which, like work of the 1930-40s and 1960-70s, was not immediately intelligible and therefore required decoding and deciphering. De Zegher detected recurring strategies and affinities in material and aesthetic experimentation across time and space, leading her to recognise relations within and across work made by women, and therefore relationality itself as a historically significant mode of practice which could produce effects.

I argued that in the curatorial organisation of knowledge around these cyclical moments which encompassed the 1990s, and in the articulation of the recurring significance of relationality, *Inside the Visible* could be understood as a platform through which the 1990s spoke itself as a heightened moment of relationality amidst repression. De Zegher became familiar with Bracha L Ettinger's theorisation of the Matrix as a relational signifier that supplements the Phallus, Mona Hatoum's interest in 'abjected' matter, and Cecilia Vicuña's considerations of weaving as a mode of cultural survival. The timeliness of relationality is further evidenced by de Zegher's relational modes of operation in curatorial practice. In an independent but related context, the co-curators of *fluent* made a curatorial claim for the contemporaneity of work by Indigenous women, at the same time communicating and even performatively revealing relations between and across their practices, their respective traditions, cultures and Countries, encompassing interrelations between land, water, animals and plants, colonial histories and the city of Venice. I argued that this introduced into the contemporaneous moment of the contemporary—the 1990s— a mode of relationality on many levels, as a concept and practice with Indigenous specificity, but also with the capacity to imbue and inflect international ideas about what the contemporary signifies and involves.

Another key focus on relationality in the mid-late 1990s was relational aesthetics, theorised by critic and curator Nicolas Bourriaud. As an articulation of relationality in artistic practice, Bourriaud's text *Relational Aesthetics* sought to explain recent shifts by foregrounding modes of resistance against the capitalist economy that are obscured by the dominant debates of disciplinary art history. The text, however, has been read as characterised by contradiction; working through the case studies has indicated in increasing depth the fact that the relational aesthetics paradigm has definite limits. Although aimed at articulating the hidden relational and connective aspects of cultural practice, the text does not account for relationality in the multi-layered sense I have proposed. Bourriaud is very clear, following Felix Guattari, that the 'fluid signifiers that make up the production of subjectivity' are the cultural environment, cultural consumerism and informational machinery.[758] This conception of subjectivity operates largely at the social/political level, whereas I have tried to illuminate the psycho-symbolic, affective and aesthetic levels of subjectivity and relationality, which are understood

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[758] Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, p. 91.

to instigate shifts at the cultural level in some ways, and correspond with cultural manifestations in others. Furthermore, Helena Reckitt's critique of relational aesthetics has enabled the effaced feminist elements of relational aesthetics (back) into view. The fact that these elements are also relational, in the sense of being shaped by and in response to relations among the practices of women, historical or otherwise, is another gap in the relational aesthetics paradigm that I have sought to address and transform into a significant concept.

The significance of the repression and effacement of relationality deepened in the second case study. I closely read across more recent art historical texts to try to ascertain the significance of the relative absence of *fluent* in discourse, which seems noteworthy given the exhibition's importance as the first occasion on which Aboriginal women represented Australia at the Venice Biennale. In *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, Ian McLean's historical account of recent shifts in attitudes towards Aboriginal art as contemporary art has made sense of a vastly complex field from which Aboriginal practices, voices and contributions have historically been excluded. In so doing, however, McLean has organised knowledge of the contemporary moment and terrain around particular conceptions of the individual, and spatial tropes that remain predicated on centre/periphery although nominally he acknowledges their underlying problems. Reading Donna Leslie's analysis suggested that art historical methodologies that do not performatively engage with relationality may have destructive effects on Indigenous cultures, which are sustained by relations. Leslie argued that effacing relations by adhering to certain paradigms may re-inscribe assimilationist logic. As much as both McLean and Bourriaud have clarified contemporary shifts and artistic practices that have challenged dominant disciplinary and socio-political formations, their authoritative statements have not necessarily offered the means to recognise or understand the depth and cultural variation of interventions, particularly their relational aspects, that are emergent in practices beyond the scope of the texts.

It is no coincidence that the relations that are subject to repression in the authoritative texts are often relations with or between women, their practices and life-worlds. In both case studies in the thesis, relationality has arisen as a mode of practice with a specific relationship to women and the feminine at a deep subjective level. In *Inside the Visible,* for example, the curatorial section 'The Weaving of Water and Words' was based on Cecilia Vicuña's practice in which women's responsibilities for caring and weaving 'fuse in naming,' and in their generative capacities, 'to care and to carry, to bear children, to bear a name' in Chilean and Mayan culture.[759] These capacities are generative not necessarily through an essentialist notion of biological reproductive femininity, or even solely because care or weaving are forms of feminised labour. They index the deeper level at which women's subjectivity is configured relationally, at the same time enabling positions, relations and ethical understandings. In *fluent,* relations between women arose not through a single pre-determined identity or even necessarily common experience or context, but through understandings and insights

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[759] de Zegher, 'Cecilia Vicuna's Ouvrage: Knot a Not, Notes as Knots', p. 348.

of relations and convergences between land, water and cultural practices, on a deep level that might be named subjective, within an Indigenous cultural specificity that is also compatible with contemporary aesthetics.

The research was developed from nearly the beginning through an interdisciplinary engagement with feminist ethics, which has been concerned with recognising and understanding the different way women's subjectivity is formed, and the different way women conceive of morality and relationships. Early work in feminist ethics critiqued the centrality of rationality and autonomy in moral theory, but by 1997 autonomy and relationality were proposed as mutually necessary.[760] Early on in the design of the research, Margaret Urban Walker's conceptualisation of a feminist 'expressive collaborative model'— also a product of the mid-1990s— was formative. Her theorisation of moral or ethical content consisting in relational practices of responsibility shaped the way I read the case study curatorial practices and exhibitions for signs of ethical impulses and understandings, without entirely doing away with the individual. Relationality, in relation to a tempered form of autonomy, was almost from the beginning understood as integral to how curatorial ethicality manifests in practice.

I therefore tailored my methodology to read for ethicality in curatorial practice. Drawing on a set of theoretical developments, I learned about the complexity of my material and ways of reading. The concept of the archive not as a fixed structure but as emergent in discourse, further inflected by my own psychic apparatus as a reader, highlighted the contingency of archival material and its meanings. In the same way the concept of ideology as a dynamic complex deepened my understanding of the unspoken elements of texts not as pre-defined but as dependent on structures and systems. The concept of feminism as a resource and poeisis of the future, an always-becoming project, also informed the methodology of symptomatic reading where 'feminist' aims and effects are not entirely known in advance.

To read for care and responsibility therefore did not mean revealing the true content or purpose of each curatorial practice. Rather, it was a project of systematically reading through the archive to try to understand each exhibition's work, and trying to sensitise myself to traces of care and evidence of a sense of responsibility that imbued the work of the exhibition on multiple levels, from social comment to affective encounter. I learned that care and responsibility would not necessarily be apparent in language, although sometimes they were. But frequently care was more likely to emerge in relation to the curators' positioning at the intersection/s of responsibilities in a field of ethical relations in a conceptual sense, which is why an understanding of the cultural and political moment proved so important. Care also emerged in relation to the curators' longer history of commitments in a temporal sense, which is why the focus on each individual, and their relations, was necessary.

As well as already being positioned relationally themselves, the curators and exhibitions I studied clearly focussed on relationality in artistic and cultural practice, aware that the excessive focus

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[760] Keller, p. 161.

on individuality in the hegemonic sites of the art world and art history did not correspond with the realities, and in fact could have had the destructive effect of isolating practitioners from the relations that produce and sustain them. The curators showed a sensitivity to these relations and a willingness to attune to them, and to try to communicate them. Additionally, the curators actively experimented with relationality at the level of curation and its affiliated activities; editing the catalogue, working with artists and responding to their own intersecting responsibilities, displaying works in the exhibition space and even wider spaces of cities. These relational curatorial gestures were designed to bring out the relationality of cultural practice.

The understanding that ethicality may manifest in relational practices, and the understanding that the curators were particularly attuned to relationality in the particular exhibitions I chose to study, came together in the readings I developed. The correspondence between the two ways of thinking for me merged especially when the curators and selected artists were seen to articulate their coming to ethical understandings themselves through their own relational experiences and encounters. Because de Zegher recognised the relational aspects of the transformative encounter with artworks, she could articulate a sense of having been ethicised, of realising an ethical capacity at the subjective level. She understood from here that she could in turn ethicise others, and work towards generating similar encounters and experiences that would engender in her readers and viewers a sense that they had an ethical capacity as well, the capability to respond to the other, and care for them in the sense of working to prevent their further repression or marginalisation. In a similar way, although culturally distinct, the curators of *fluent* showed a similar understanding that connections to Indigenous culture through cultural practices enable an understanding of cultural values which are also ethical, and therefore ethicality. They presented Yvonne Koolmatrie's woven eel traps for example in ways that highlighted the role of Ngarrindjeri weaving in showing the importance of relations, which had the capacity to heal a broken spirit and help people reconnect with ethical and cultural values, which are also broadly relational. The curatorial sense, however subtle at first, of relationality and values which are relational as a source of sustenance and livelihood, actually turned out to enable ethical potential.

I have attempted to develop a way of reading exhibitions and curatorial practices that does not de-politicise in its own processes, or in the way it conceives of practice. Codes of ethics in museum institutions, along with diversity policies, have been criticised recently by key figures in different discourses for banalising political commitments, struggles and acts of resistance. By transforming political consciousness into abstract guidelines for best practice and/or sets of minimum standards, codes and policies may have the effect of reducing attempts to rethink systems and structures to finite checklists that effectively manage and contain political action and efficacy. Similarly the ethical capacities of collective and cumulative acts of institutions have been somewhat lost in the emphasis on individuals who periodically confront one-off ethical 'issues,' rather than a rethinking of positions or relations to institutions or systems, or the cumulative effects of many individual acts or collective inaction. These diagnoses reveal that ethicality as it is currently conceived in relation to curatorial practice does not extend to, or inhabit, subjectivity. This amounts to the 'derresponsibilisation' of

curatorial subjects, as Miguel A. Hernández-Navarro has argued, minimising curators' sense of their own ethical capacities and capabilities, which suits the requirements of neoliberalism.

I have tried to respond to these criticisms without effacing the significance of codes and diversity policies, which currently represent, more or less, the level of institutional engagement with ethics. This means that while problematic, codes and diversity policies have an important role that is by far preferable to their absence. As a way of expanding and enriching the way ethicality is understood to take shape, however, I have developed a conceptual framework that re-conceives of curatorial subjectivity as already replete with ethical capacities. Furthermore the conceptual framework has re-envisioned the field of curatorial practice as an ethical field in which curators participate and are implicated. This formation has enabled the specific contours of ethicality to come to light not from a prior, fixed notion of what it entails, or in relation to the advice of an ethics committee, but from the existing ways that curators work. Whether de Zegher's sense of responsibility towards displaying and lighting an artwork in such a way that encouraged an intimate encounter with minimal distractions, so as not to make demands on the artwork, or Croft's ongoing commitment to conveying the vitality (rather than mortality) of Indigenous art, ethicality transpired to be already emergent in curatorial practice.

To build on this, I have attempted to devise a way of reading that does not contribute towards the relegation of the ethical from debates about aesthetics and/or politics. These three fields recognisably co-exist and interrelate, the more care is understood as a politicised, interdisciplinary concept or resource. Key debates in curatorial studies literature and feminisms and curating discourse have yet to address the complexity. Without the intervention I offer, these interrelated fields continue to be marked by compartmentalisation, and the state of knowledge about contemporary curatorial practice remains limited, and hostile to the complexities of difference. On the one hand, if the question of politics is sidelined from discussions of care and the aesthetic, there is not necessarily potential for political change or intervention, and care and ethicality may even be misappropriated to contradictory ends such as paternalism, because there is a lack of engagement with critiques of power and institutions. On the other hand, if care is thought of only in the political terms of a critique of capitalism, and care is understood to signify caring labour, as much as this may signal ethical issues of working conditions and so on, it cannot be registered as a practice of ethicality in its own right. This has the knock-on effect for curating of limiting the significance of care to social and political dimensions of practice and foreclosing the unfolding of ethicisation in an aesthetic sense, on an affective level which is intertwined with subject formation. Both of these situations constitute significant threats to the livelihood of practices and forms that do not conform to current tropes which are limited by their relegation of key terms. This affects not only the status of the case study exhibitions, but implicated and related communities, agents, ideas and ways of knowing. There is therefore arguably great value in having the case study exhibitions in the curatorial studies and exhibition histories archive, insofar as their relational modes of curating resist reductive stratification and generate multi-faceted alternatives. Having a framework for reading curatorial practice that is

attuned to care also potentially transforms the curatorial field, as instances of curatorial practice can be read, known and understood as multi-layered interventions that stand as imaginative inscriptions in culture, from which curators, students and others may read, learn and work. The thesis aims to compound a sense that there is a back-history of progressive curatorial practice, in which experiments and resolutions to political and representational dilemmas have already taken place, approximating a platform on which to begin or continue questioning, learning and intervening.

At the same time as counteracting some understandings of care and the ethical, however, the way of reading that focuses on care and responsibility is intended to co-exist with other readings in the field of contemporary art without negating their importance or capacity to produce effects. By its formulation in relation to critiques of frameworks for moral theory that pursue objectivity and privilege innate reason, this mode of reading has attempted to avoid moralising or establishing boundaries or criteria in terms of right and wrong, or judging the capabilities of other paradigms or theories. At the same time it has been elaborated to consistently attune to possible repression and marginalisation of the other. I have therefore highlighted the gestures of other lines of inquiry in contemporary discourse where they foreclose the efficacy of methodologies, positions and readings different to their own. This ethos in itself is hoped to inflect and challenge the homogeneity emergent in the feminisms and curating discourse, for instance, which is currently characterised by claims of the urgency of some imperatives, at the cost of many other possibilities and sometimes to their detriment. The thesis therefore aims to advance the cause of care because it helps to instate rigorous self-reflexivity and responsiveness to the constant possibility of contributing to marginalisation and exclusion. The relentless focus on the processes of othering, for example repression and assimilation, and the constant attention to seeking out generative alternatives, are the means by which this framework is designed to nourish social and political change.

The limits of a reading that proposes to value care have also been considered, so as to avoid the assertion of idealistic fantasies of infinite inclusion or universal efficacy. This would be to risk blindness to selectivity which would perpetuate repression unknowingly. Selectivity has been acknowledged as itself a feature of curating, whether at the level of selecting artworks or artists, or at the level of using language, which centralises the self out of necessity. Both Croft and de Zegher appeared to be attentive to selectivity at play in their respective practices, understanding its possibilities and more problematic implications. For example, both curators expressed a desire not to produce accounts of artistic practice that were (solely) representative of entire nations or temporal moments in the exhibitions they curated, understanding the unfeasible expectations that this places on artworks, at the same time as creating a falsely unifying impression that essentialises difference, or contributes to tokenism. In this sense the way artists and works were selected were highly meditated to produce sensitive knowledge. Other examples include when de Zegher self-reflexively and poetically engaged ideas of language, alterity, space and play in the curatorial themes of *Inside the Visible,* and when Croft clearly stated that one artist in *fluent* was selected simply because she was the most well-known. While each of these positions was designed to bring about certain effects, equally

there were limitations to what kind of resonance they could affect. This did not mean the curators were short-sighted or ineffectual, but that they understood the need for specific strategies in specific contexts, and the fact that they could not meet all needs at all times.

Accordingly, I have tried to highlight that selectivity and the taking of opportunities can run alongside a desire to counteract repression and marginalisation. It is just important that curatorial practice being investigated for acts of care is not elevated to the authoritative or representative position of functioning as a—or *the*—model for caring/feminist/counter-colonial/ethical practice. Rather I have posited each case study as a singular intervention that was shaped by a particular configuration of historical circumstances, not a culturally-mobile template or universal resolution to all dilemmas highlighted by cultural debates, feminist or otherwise. Instead I tried to explore how each case study might be understood, and activated, as an instance of curatorial care. As reading Margaret Urban Walker has disclosed, ethicality consists in practices, rather than in the theories trying to describe and understand them. I have tried, therefore, to demonstrate how case studies might be organised, assembled, and read for a curatorial sense of care. This could then potentially lead to wider recognition of the work of each curator's practice, and their transformative potentials and possibilities, which are in evidence contemporaneously but that may also be yet to come. In this sense the case studies could be accessed as resources, which show the effectiveness and intelligibility (and occasionally ineffectiveness and unintelligibility) of certain strategies in certain situations, offer ideas for curators, artists and other practitioners, and even potentially work on us as readers and viewers. Even through the archive it may be possible to encounter these curatorial practices and the artistic, art historical and critical practices they involve or encompass, and experience a transformed position or ethicising realisation.

I can come to this conclusion especially because my own experience as a researcher and writer worked upon, and ultimately transformed my own subjectivisation. Early stages of the research, particularly selecting case studies and learning about their respective geo-political contexts and remits, played out in response to tugs of responsibility and ethical impulses on my own part, alongside scholarly rationales such as appropriateness for research in the context of the study. As I studied feminist ethics, Indigenous community values and so on, I came to understand more deeply the profundity of relational modes of ethicality, and learned to articulate and recognise with theoretical tools my own embeddedness in a shifting intersection of relations. This unfolding process rationalises the mirroring throughout the thesis between my own sense of ethical encounters, and the practices of ethicality sensed and enacted by the curators, artists and other agents with/on whom I worked. At the end of the doctoral journey, I can attest to the very real process of ethicisation borne of a variety of ethical encounters through the 'living archive.'

The conceptualisation of a curatorial practice of care is deeply related to feminist futures and Indigenous futures. The way of reading and thinking I have developed in the thesis imagines and defends, but most importantly inaugurates the conditions for futures of independent curatorial practice

that are not bound by cycles of repression and marginalisation, but equipped and enabled to contribute towards productive shifts that embrace and generate sensitive knowledge about art and cultural practices of those who have been subjected to repression and marginalisation. By recognising the efficacy of this capacity in recent instances of curatorial practice, I hope to have foregrounded effective and generative modes of practice for the future.

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