

Maria Lind  
**Situating the  
Curatorial**

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### 1. An Image of a Stone

An artist goes for a hike in the hills on the outskirts of Beijing. She is searching through the lush forest for a stone that bears no visible trace of human manipulation, and stumbles across a sizeable rock with an intriguing shape. It appears untouched by *Homo sapiens*, and she brings the rock back to her studio in Shanghai, a journey of 1,400 kilometers. As the stone is neither small nor smooth, the journey becomes a complicated and cumbersome project. Once in the studio, the rock becomes the model, or motif, for a 1:1-scale black-and-white picture. It sits at the center of a naturalistic depiction, covering most of the picture plane. As a lithograph, *Refined Still Life #1* becomes a visual echo or afterimage of the artist Yu Ji's endeavor.



Yu Ji, *Refined Still Life #1*, 2016. Handcrafted wooden frame encasing and lithograph.

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Why am I so fascinated by Yu Ji's work? I am not usually attracted to artworks like this. And yet my fascination is definitely connected to the simple effect of being drawn to something that I did not expect. The work has haunted me since I saw it in the artist's studio in 2016. Shortly afterwards, I invited her to exhibit the lithograph as part of the 11th Gwangju Biennale, but the work still continued to pose unexpected questions. In 2018, I returned to the work, exhibiting it in the group exhibition "Soon Enough: Art in Action" at Tensta Konsthall, after having written a column about it for *Art Review*. My curiosity was triggered not only by the artist's openness to allowing the unexpected and mundane to become part of the work. I was also drawn to her presumably boring and unnecessarily laborious act of transporting a perfectly ordinary rock – after all, most of earth's stones are untouched by human beings – over a great distance, which nonetheless testifies to an interest in the land and its properties and faculties. Somehow this resonates with art as a form of understanding that goes alongside



Installation view of the exhibition *Soon Enough: Art in Action*. Left: Ann Lislegaard, *Oracles, Owls ... Some Animals Never Sleep*, 2012–2014. Special version, 3-D animation, sound. Right: Yu Ji, *Refined Still Life #1*, 2016. Lithograph. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

politics, science, and religion, even encompassing such other forms of understanding while carrying a unique potential to also go against them.

Then there is the creation of the material artwork: it is complex without involving high production values (lithography being an old technique for reproducing images by drawing on the flat surface of limestone). The peculiar repetition of the object depicted and the picture itself is also captivating – an image of a stone without any trace of human hands, made precisely by human hands and the very same stone. Such tautologies can be gimmicky and nostalgic, but here the return to an old-fashioned technique arises from the work asking for it, rather than from melancholic attachment (such as in the frequent fetishization of celluloid film and slides by artists in the 1990s). The demand in turn has to do with something foundational in reproducing an image that is obviously not only pre-digital, but pre-electrical.

Every time I hear the argument in politically engaged art circles that art-making as we know it – whether discrete art objects, research-based work, or more performative practices – cannot continue under the conditions imposed by the politics of hard-line right-wing governments, I am reminded of *Refined Still Life #1*, because I disagree: now is the time to intensify our focus upon art as it has been practiced, in all its variety

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– perhaps with new distinctions. What was instructive about Yu Ji’s work is connected to its combination of simplicity and something extremely laborious that points to the very ground on which we stand. The work was not meant to be majestic – quite the contrary – and yet in my eyes it is grand precisely because of its modesty. Such distinctions should warn us against focusing on a single privileged form of art or art-making aligned to the good political taste of the connoisseur. Rather, distinctions should be based on complexity, relevance, and urgency, often situationally so. We need to distinguish inquiry from gesture, pertinence from entertainment, uniqueness from routine. We need to ask what the artwork does, and test it with changing “wheres,” “whens” and “hows.” This amounts to various definitions of “quality” that need to be continuously debated. And simultaneously – and importantly – we need to make time for civic engagement, whether through art or not. Many of us are able to make the crucial decision about how we prioritize time.

In this context, the self-determination of the artist is not to be disregarded. Following through with counterintuitive thoughts is indispensable here – to believe in the spark of an idea, or even a shard of a vision, which at the stage of the making of the work is often unintelligible to others, yet this spark can be trusted. The challenge today – and for some time



Installation view of the exhibition *It's Not Necessary to Understand Everything* (2017) by Naeem Mohaiemen. This exhibition was part of the program *Eros Effect: Art, Solidarity Movements and the Quest for Social Justice*. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.



Installation view of the exhibition *What the Trees See* (2015) by Mats Adelman, Tensta Konsthall.

– has been to avoid becoming ensnared in political panic, and to avoid dropping everything because of it. In his 2017 exhibition “You Don’t Have to Understand Everything” at Tensta Konsthall, artist Naeem Mohaiemen addressed the security panic in post-9/11 US, and how that triggered his interest in the 1970s as another period of security panic that overlapped with novel models of life and society. Faced with authoritarian, nationalist, and fascist forces, we need new beginnings, and new beginnings typically abound in places of uncertainty and fear.

This is also where relevant art, such as Yu Ji’s lithograph, tends to arise. Awkward and hard to grasp, and yet insistent, it is about the possibility of seeing and doing things otherwise, and continuing to doing so. The kind of artistic intelligence at play in selecting, among innumerable untouched natural objects, a particular one that carries traces from millions of years ago, is about being proactive and procreative rather than reactive. It demands another kind of art – one that already exists, but tends to be marginalized, even among those with whom it shares many interests and concerns. At its best, art cultivates the counterintuitive, manifesting the notion that everything can be

different – through means that we did not expect, have not yet imagined, or maybe even forgot existed. Just starting down this path means cultivating this already existing, yet marginalized, form of intuition.

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## 2. The Curatorial

More than ten years ago I started to think in terms of “the curatorial.” At the core of “the curatorial” lie connections – between artworks and other material, the space, the specific time of presentation. Colleagues and peers were interested in similar ideas: discussing the emergence of the field of curating, Beatrice von Bismarck has emphasized the “constellational mode” of “the curatorial,” i.e., the dynamic field of constellations in which are embedded various activities having to do with making art public.<sup>1</sup> Irit Rogoff has talked about curated projects as “events of knowledge,” settings where different kinds of knowledge come together and something new is tested.<sup>2</sup> Curated events contain epistemological processes and are presentational rather than representational, a distinction that Rogoff credits to the visitors to an exhibition. This is how I formulated it around the same time:



Installation view of the exhibition Fuel to the Fire (2016) by Natascha Sadr Haghghighian at Tensta konsthall. This exhibition was part of the program Eros Effect: Art, Solidarity Movements and the Quest for Social Justice. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

For me the term “curating” is used as the technical modality of making art go public. It is a craft that can be involved in much more than making exhibitions – beyond the walls of an institution as well as beyond what are traditionally called programming and education. This is “curating in the expanded field.” The curatorial is understood as a multidimensional role that includes critique, editing, education, fundraising, etc. But even more importantly, the curatorial goes beyond “roles” and takes the shape of a function and a method, even a methodology.

Understood in this way “the curatorial” can be compared with Chantal Mouffe’s notion of “the political.”<sup>3</sup> Searching for a more appropriate model of democracy than the prevalent representative forms – which are now being severely challenged in many parts of the world – Mouffe outlines a version in which opposition is crucial and consensus, with its tendency to minimize disagreement and dissensus, is the problem. Mouffe argues for “the political” as an ever-present potential that cannot be precisely located, but which grows out of the antagonism between friend and enemy. “The political” is the aspect of life that is connected to disagreement and dissent, and is therefore the antithesis of consensus. For Mouffe, “politics” – as opposed to the political – is the formal side of practices that reproduce social and structural orders. With this in mind, the politics/political distinction can be mapped onto the curating/curatorial distinction, with curating – as opposed to the curatorial – as a technical modality we know from art institutions and independent projects. “The curatorial,” on the other hand, would be a more distributed presence aimed at creating friction and pushing new ideas through signification processes and relationships between objects, people, places, ideas, and so forth. “The curatorial” does not stop at the status quo.

### 3. Fuel to the Fire

Natascha Sadr Haghighian’s installation *Fuel to the Fire* at Tensta Konsthall in 2016 can be seen as an example of the curatorial: it raised topical issues like the militarization of the police, images as testimonies, and institutionalized racism and violence. The patio heaters and fleece blankets usually associated with outdoor seating were used in Sadr Haghighian’s work as markers of enclosure or exclusion. In one area the blankets carried screen-printed images of incidents of police violence that provoked significant protests. The installation also included parts of a balcony from a Swedish

Million Program housing unit from around 1970, a sound piece with leaking headphones, and newspaper clippings echoing media stereotypes and alternative narratives. A newly produced *Fuel to the Fire* newspaper published material on the history of SWAT police and the role of eyewitness video in creating a crisis of legitimacy for the police. The free newspaper also included interviews with activist Hamid Khan, cultural geographer Irene Molina, and journalist Somar Al Naher, among others, and could be taken home as study material.

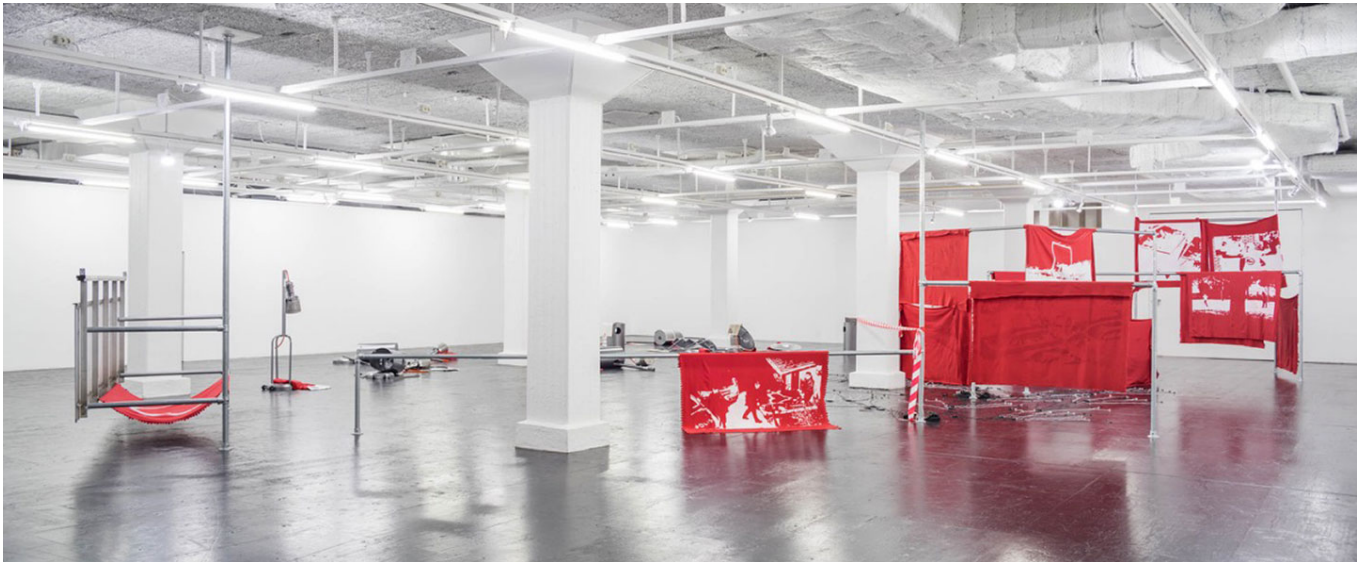
*Fuel to the Fire* was prompted by the fatal shooting of Lenine Relvas-Martins, a sixty-nine-year-old resident of the Stockholm suburb of Husby, near Tensta, on the night of May 13, 2013, by Piketen police – a Swedish SWAT team – in his own apartment. Neighbors were present and witnessed a crucial moment in which Lenine’s dead body was carried out in a body bag, covered by a red fleece blanket adorned with a heart. The police claimed in their report that Lenine was injured during the incident and taken to a hospital. However, images taken by neighbors and freelance journalist Björn Lockström proved that they tried to cover up Lenine’s death, and the police were forced to “correct” their report. The incident caused protests in Husby and resulted in a significant uprising in many major cities in Sweden. Nobody was held responsible for the fatal shooting, nor was it discussed in mainstream print media in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Instead, the media reported mainly on car fires and youth violence, furthering a stigmatized image of the northern suburbs of Stockholm.

*Fuel to the Fire* traced the Piketen police back to its beginnings in American SWAT teams. Standing for “Special Weapons and Tactics,” SWAT was founded in Los Angeles in the late 1960s after the 1965 Watts riots and was first used during a raid against the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense. The story of the emergence of SWAT teams proves the intimate relation between police militarization, social segregation, and institutional racism. It also exemplifies how these developments have reached a global scale, with SWAT teams spreading literally across the planet since their origin in Los Angeles, including to a place as seemingly peaceful as Sweden.

After an open invitation in 2011, Sadr Haghighian began making intensive research visits to Tensta and other parts of Stockholm in 2014, meeting with both individuals and groups who all contributed to the shaping of *Fuel to the Fire*’s narrative. Participants in Nyhetsbyrån (The news agency), Tensta Konsthall’s long-term initiative for young people interested in developing storytelling skills through text, audio,

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Installation view of the exhibition *Fuel to the Fire* (2016) by Natascha Sadr Haghghian at Tensta konsthall. This exhibition was part of the program *Eros Effect: Art, Solidarity Movements and the Quest for Social Justice*. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

or other artistic practices, followed the process. In autumn 2016, Nyhetsbyrån produced its own newspaper that took the exhibition as a starting point. Over the course of the exhibition and as part of Nyhetsbyrån's public program, Leandro Schlarek Mulinari, a PhD student in criminology at Stockholm University, formed an open reading group addressing issues like scare tactics, the police's own reporting, and how the suburbs are described by the media. Additionally, a film program and symposium further unpacked the themes and questions raised in *Fuel to the Fire*.

*Fuel to the Fire* can be described as an installation version of an agitprop work from the 1920s – clear, forceful, and taking a position, and even incorporating the characteristically bold red, white, and black palette of the Russian avant-garde. It caused debate both on social media and in the mainstream media, with some considering it polarizing or criticizing it for not allowing the perspective of the police to enter the discussion. This is a valid point: the artist consciously chose not to include this perspective since it has been given so much space in other contexts. And, of course, an artwork does not have to be “balanced.”

The curatorial precisely attempts to inhabit this lack of balance and struggles to expand and

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amplify it, in contrast to “curating,” which usually seeks to rebalance the work or otherwise hasten the return of equilibrium. When curating engages with the world outside the traditional boundaries of art and its institutions, it often assumes that this sphere is not only separate from the sphere of art but should also be left as is. Any work of art, project, exhibition, or programming at an art institution is then placed in service of that aim. The curatorial, by contrast, assumes that the world outside the institution, as well as the institution itself, is always already unbalanced, and for this reason, it does not shy away from tension and divergence. Condensed into the lithograph of the stone by Yu Ji, it is the relative deficiency of artistic routine and common sense that constitutes the curatorial.

#### 4. Tensta Konsthall

Trying to situate the curatorial in the context of Tensta Konsthall, as its director from 2011 to 2018, meant emphasizing the mediation between artworks and people, driven by a sense that much of what a given artwork has to offer is rarely tapped into sufficiently. As a private foundation founded in 1998 by a locally based artist and his peers, the mission of the Konsthall – which applies for and receives support from



A Language café event, part of The Silent University, an independent educational platform initiated by the artist Ahmet Ögut and led by Fahyma Alnablsi, 2014. This event was part of the program Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.



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Archival material from the Kurdish Association Spånga, the Kurdish National Association, and Rohat Alakom, 1970–present. Archival material selected by members of the associations and Asrin Haidari, communicator at Tensta Konsthall.

the municipality, the national arts council, and the region – is to simultaneously work with contemporary art and to have a local presence in its Stockholm suburb of Tensta. Today, 90 percent of the twenty-thousand or so people living in Tensta have a translocal background. While more than one hundred languages are spoken in the area, many people come from East Africa and the Middle East. The population has a lower overall income than the national average, as well as higher unemployment rates, similar to other suburbs in Sweden’s capital – one of the most segregated cities in Europe. More than an exception, Tensta can be seen as the new normal, pointing to the future.

Certain artworks already take mediation and untapped potential as their point of departure, such as Ahmet Ögüt’s educational platform *The Silent University*. Founded in collaboration with Delfina, The Showroom, and the Tate Modern in 2012, *The Silent University* took the form of a language café at Tensta Konsthall in 2013, where people without legal papers could practice their language skills. In this way, the work activated the “silenced knowledge” of migrant populations, who are sometimes highly educated in their countries of origin but given little academic opportunity in their new home. *The Silent University* has taken

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different forms in the different places it has manifested. In Bremen, Paris, Athens, Amman, and elsewhere, lectures, seminars, and workshops were held for people whose legal status otherwise prevents them from using their academic credentials. Fahyma Alnablsi, who was trained as a teacher in Damascus but couldn’t get a job as one in Sweden, was the receptionist at Tensta Konsthall and led the language café there, assisted by a handful of volunteers. Initially, the language café met once a week, but then began meeting twice a week, with monthly excursions to other parts of the segregated city of Stockholm.

*The Silent University* started at Tensta Konsthall as a part of the 2013 exhibition “Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden,” which looked at history and memory in Tensta through the people there and the location itself. Works by around forty artists, architects, researchers, local associations, and musicians ranged from nineteenth-century watercolors of rooms rented by a single woman who was a member of the precariat living in Södermalm – socially similar in that period to Tensta today – to commissions by artists such as Petra Bauer and Peter Geschwind, archival material from the Kurdish Association, and a soundtrack by the hip-hop star Adam Tensta. Two Tensta Museum branches



Sketch by Igor Dergalin, the architect of Tensta Konsthall, date unknown. This drawing was included in the program *Tensta Museum: Reports from New Sweden*. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

in the middle of the city, at the Stockholm City Museum and the Museum of Medieval Stockholm, emphasized the institutional play between a suburb often thought of as a ghetto and the fragile private foundation of the Konsthall and the established municipal museums in the primarily white and wealthy city center.

Through the adventure called “Tensta Museum,” which also looked at Tensta as an example of a “new Sweden” that is different from the internationally recognized image of the country as a generous welfare state with a blond and blue-eyed population – the reality of which has changed significantly over the last thirty years – the team at Tensta Konsthall got to know many new people and organizations. One of them – a local Swedish language school run by the municipality – asked if they could hold their classes at the art center. A setup then emerged that functioned as a classroom, which in turn led to other groups, such as a homework assistance group, local city administrators who hold team meetings, and a Save the Children parents forum, holding meetings and activities in the space.<sup>4</sup>

After that, “Tensta Museum” developed into a continuing program, through which a fragile organization run more or less as a project with insecure funding could pretend to have the stability and continuity of a museum. There were commissions from artists such as Laura Oldfield Ford, Ylva Westerlund, and Mats Adelman, and presentations of works by Jakob Kolding, Halil Altindere, and Lawrence Abu Hamdan, as well as original drawings by Tensta’s planning architect, Igor Dergalin. This self-institutionalization generated the Nyhetsbyrå initiative (which became part of Sadr Haghghian’s *Fuel to the Fire*) as a course for eighteen-to-twenty-five-year-olds to use journalism, art, and design to tell different stories about places in the city similar to Tensta. As a collaboration between the department of media studies at Stockholm University, the illustration department at Konstfack University College of Arts, Craft, and Design, and Tensta Konsthall, the course drew from all three fields and connected directly to Tensta Konsthall’s exhibitions. Interestingly, it turned into a springboard for young people writing for the local newspaper or well-known blogs, producing TV programs, and even publishing their poetry.

## 5. Contact Zones

Known in different parts of the world as “education,” “learning,” and “programming,” mediation in the context of my time at Tensta Konsthall was based on finding and establishing contact surfaces and shared concerns between

artworks, artists, other cultural producers, and individuals as well as groups and organizations. Mediation does not aim at unanimity but rather underlines inquiry, debate, and unexplored possibilities. Instead of thinking in terms of “communities,” we thought in terms of “contact zones,” a notion developed by anthropologists Mary Louise Pratt<sup>5</sup> and James Clifford,<sup>6</sup> to emphasize transversality between various groups rather than coherence within them.

Pratt uses the term “contact zone” to describe social spaces where various cultures collide and try to deal with each other, often through asymmetrical power relations arising from colonial history, slavery, and their repercussions. Pratt also employs the term to reconsider the prevalent models of community in academic and social work. Seen as a contact zone, Tensta Konsthall sometimes included a certain amount of “auto-ethnographic” material – texts, images, and other documents in which participants describe themselves. This material also dealt with the representations that others make of the participants, as well as with material produced by people who do not live and work in Tensta. This form of “transculturation” whereby subordinate groups engage with material from a dominant group aims to replace reductive concepts of assimilation commonly used in colonial cultures. While some projects within this frame at Tensta Konsthall testified to the fact that subordinate groups cannot usually control what comes out of the dominant culture, it remains possible – and normal – to determine what gets absorbed and how.

James Clifford describes contact zones as “places of hybrid possibility and political negotiation, sites of exclusion and struggle.”<sup>7</sup> He uses the notion when discussing the work of North American tribal museums and minority cultural centers. Developing the vocabulary further, he talks about “contact perspectives” and describes the relations prevalent in contact zones as “contact relations” that make possible new collaborations and alliances. The work carried out there is “contact work.”<sup>8</sup> Like Pratt, Clifford emphasizes these zones as conflictual rather than consensual, with both negative and positive historical possibilities that need to be confronted. At Tensta Konsthall it seemed particularly relevant to bring such “contact phenomena” into discussions where different agendas and different views on coercion, exploitation, and ethnocentrism could share the same project and generate reflection and critique.<sup>9</sup>

Placing art as the heart and brain of Tensta Konsthall meant showing both art exhibitions and other kinds of curated projects, which both were and were not related to the local area. An



Installation view of the exhibition *Thirty-three Stories about Reasonable Characters in Familiar Places* (2012) by Iman Issa, Tensta Konsthall. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

example of a classical, more straightforward art exhibition held at Tensta Konsthall was the 2013 solo show by Iman Issa, which featured abstract works about memory and the human ability to form associations. Using photography, text, sculpture, video, and audio, she presented fragments from everyday experience – a trip to the zoo, a day at school, a family vacation – that were described with barely any adjectives, names, or other details. Issa’s process was to first strip down the description of a moment so that only the most common elements remained, and then to rethink and create anew the moment, inspecting the space that emerged. In this way, she reflected on how individual experience is linked to collective experience. Included in the show were several works that excerpted from the autobiographies of Arab intellectuals such as Nawal El Saadawi and Edward Said. In one interesting example of curatorial mediation, the Konsthall team took these autobiographies as a starting point to create a series of introductions to the show in Arabic, which were then sent to two women’s centers in the Tensta neighborhood.

Remaining art-centric is essential, as is trying to find and develop contact zones with artworks, artists, groups, and individuals beyond

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a specific locale. At Tensta Konsthall, this entailed consciously aligning activities at the center with education curricula, in the shape of seminars, workshops, and lectures. One example was the seminars offered in collaboration with the Stockholm School of Economics, as part of Goldin+Senneby’s dispersed retrospective “Standard Length of a Miracle” in 2016. Later that same year, as part of Marion von Osten’s “Viet Nam Discourse Stockholm,” a whole course in choreography was held at the Konsthall. Thanks to a collaboration with a number of universities across Sweden, a class entitled “Migration Course: On the Politics and Practices of Migration” also drew together professors and researchers specializing in migration to give onsite lectures and seminars in Tensta. All of this forms part of the contact and conflict zones, which in and of themselves constitute public, or semi-public, space.

### 6. The Eros Effect

Every so often, I play devil’s advocate with myself, borrowing some of the arguments formulated by Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams in their 2015 book *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work*. They warn against the danger of being content with



Installation view of the exhibition Viet Nam Discourse Stockholm (2016) by Marion von Osten and Peter Spillmann. On view is work by Gunilla Palmstierna Weiss and documentation of Palmstierna Weiss’s collaborations with Peter Weiss. This exhibition was part of the program *Eros Effect: Art, Solidarity Movements, and the Quest for Social Justice*. Photo: Jean-Baptiste Beranger.

the local and with the “prefigurative politics” they describe as a desire to realize a future world right away, as much art today exemplifies. Srnicek and Williams argue that privileging temporal, spatial, and conceptual immediacy leads to “folk politics” – “a collective and historically constructed political common sense that has become out of joint with the actual mechanisms of power.”<sup>10</sup> For Srnicek and Williams, the automatic praise of immediacy as authenticity is extremely dangerous. Fleeting practices are favored over systematic and structural work, tactics over strategy, and the past over the future. Small-scale projects and transparency occupy us with patching up little wounds rather than, as the authors write, “building counter-hegemony.”

I agree: localism can certainly distract from larger concerns, and folk-political action can easily give the instant gratification of “having done something.” The “independent blips of resistance” can be pacifying. Importantly, Srnicek and Williams bring up the long-term strategy of the ordoliberal in post-WWII Europe, who managed to create a neoliberal utopia based on a new political common sense through private elite organizations like the Mont Pelerin Society targeting “second-hand dealers” – journalists, academics, teachers, and the like. They managed to defeat Keynesianism and replace the law-based legitimacy of democracy with the efficiency-based legitimacy of a well-functioning economy. The impossible became the inevitable. In the face of this, the authors advocate cultivating some of the core concerns of left modernity – an image of historical progress, a universalist horizon, and a commitment to emancipation.

Let’s return for a moment to the context of Sadr Haghghian’s *Fuel to the Fire*. It was part of an ongoing series at Tensta Konsthall entitled “The Eros Effect: Art, Solidarity Movements, and the Struggle for Social Justice,” a multiyear inquiry into the relationship between art and solidarity movements, which after 2015 unfolded through a series of commissions, exhibitions, workshops, presentations, and film screenings. Inspired by the many research-based projects by artists on emancipatory postcolonial struggles and liberation movements during the 1960s and ’70s, and faced with fascist parties gaining ground in Europe and an increasingly tough social climate, it seemed important to return to the notion of solidarity in order to test its validity today. Will solidarity still be relevant in the future, or is it a historical concept? Is it necessary to find new ways to describe the political movements of today and their struggles, sympathies, and commitments? What does recognizing the urgency of a situation imply, and

how do we act upon it?

The entirety of “Eros Effect” borrowed ideas from a 1989 essay of the same name by the researcher and activist George Katsiaficas, which argues that the emotional dimensions of social movements are just as important as their political dimensions.<sup>11</sup> The concept of the “eros effect” turns away from earlier theories that considered “mass movements” as either primitive, impulsive emotional outbursts, or as exclusively rational efforts to change social norms and institutions. Katsiaficas instead suggests that social movements have always been both, and that the struggle for liberation is equally an erotic act and a rational desire to break free from structural and psychological barriers. Franz Fanon made similar observations when he stated that resistance to colonialism has positive effects on the emotional life of individuals.<sup>12</sup>

To stay with a question and develop themes over time has proven a rewarding methodology that is not unlike a strategy. It has facilitated being internationally connected and locally embedded at the same time, combining theory and practice, history and current affairs, present and future scenarios. It has meant shifting from micro to macro without necessarily being scalable. Maintaining an active interest in abstraction can be advantageous in this; while it might not be human scale, it is nevertheless small scale, not unlike Yu Ji’s rock functioning as a prism moving from a geological fragment to the volcanic beginnings of the earth, from the here-and-now to prehuman history. Here, proximity is more critical than immediacy. Moving slowly but steadily is possibly more rewarding for art in the long run, and for the people who engage with it. We are individuals and groups who make up a kind of constituency, in the middle of something that could be called “the curatorial.” Maybe these are, in fact, modest and searching moves towards building a counterhegemony – an art-centric one.

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This text is based on a paper presented at e-flux in 2017 in response to the premise “current political circumstances have made us think again about what it means to share knowledge in a clear and direct style.”

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1  
Irit Rogoff and Beatrice von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial," in *Cultures of the Curatorial*, ed. Beatrice von Bismarck, Jörn Schaffaff, and Thomas Weski (Sternberg Press, 2012), 24.

2  
Rogoff and von Bismarck, "Curating/Curatorial," 23.

3  
Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (Routledge, 2005).

4  
See *Tensta Museum*, ed. Maria Lind (Sternberg Press and Tensta Konsthall, 2021).

5  
Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," in *Ways of Reading*, 5th edition, ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrofsky (Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999). Pratt describes contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power."

6  
James Clifford, *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Harvard University Press, 1997). Clifford specifically discusses the museum as a contact zone.

7  
Clifford, *Routes*, 212.

8  
Clifford, *Routes*, 204, 200, 202.

9  
For more on conflict zones, see Nora Sternfeld, "Memorial Sites as Contact Zones: Cultures of Memory in a Shared/Divided Present," *Transversal*, December 2011 <https://eipcp.net/policies/sterfeld/en.html>.

10  
Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams, *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World Without Work* (Verso, 2015), 10.

11  
George Katsiaficas, "Eros Effect," 1989 <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ebdbc8bbc7d495c7859db2/t/5f0f651f0e8f3469cef3be41/1594844448607/eroseffectpaper.PDF>.

12  
Other parts of the "Eros Effect" series at Tensta Konsthall have been an inaugural symposium with, among others, Kodwo Eshun of the Otolith Group, Doreen Mende, Mathieu Kleyebe Abonenc, and Dmitry Vilensky of Chto Delat; a film commission by Filipa César; a mini-exhibition and a seminar entitled "Excavating International Solidarity: Artist Actions, Museography and Exhibition Histories"; and Naeem Mohaiemen's solo presentation "You Don't Have to Understand Everything."